AUNT JUDY'S LETTERS.

CROSSING THE GREEN

AUNT JUDY'S LETTERS.

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TO THE "LITTLE ONES"

WHO ARE FAST GROWING UP,

THIS SEQUEL TO

"AUNT JUDY'S TALES"

IS

INSCRIBED.

M. G.

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funny, those young attempts at letters, and surprisingly alike. The writers were always so "*very sorry for not writing before*," and then so "*very glad Aunt Judy was well*," and so very soon "*afraid*" they had "*nothing more to say*," that it was really quite curious. Of course there were a few in-between bits of news, of very domestic character, such as that the favourite dog had walked into a puddle that morning, and was "*so dirty he was quite a pig*," or else that John had just washed him, and he was "*quite a dear*." Or if by any good fortune they had been out to tea, Aunt Judy was duly informed that it was "*such fun*." After which they were her affectionate brother or sister, as the case might be.

Of course both the spelling and writing of these productions were somewhat imperfect. It is a long time before even the easiest columns in Mavor get fairly nudged into a little one's head. For instance, in spite of the numbers of *Johns* they read of in story-books, their John was always *Jhon;* and they constantly seemed to think the *w* in *write* a most unnecessary addition to a very simple word.

Then, everybody knows what a difficult thing it is to write without a few ink-blots here and there, and straight across the paper, instead of sideways down into the corner (which is, of course, the natural way); and how could the little ones be expected to always wait for the second page of lines, and never to fill their pens too full?

Certainly they could not. But then the result

was, that Aunt Judy could not always read the letters quite as fast as they had been written.

She encouraged the letter-writing, however, simple and imperfect as it was, knowing that it had a value quite its own. What we call *sympathy*—that is, the feeling for and with other people in the little ups and downs of life—is the very bond of love, and the greatest check to a selfish caring for nobody but oneself; and without it the love is very apt to go to sleep, even if it does not altogether die out.

The *very sorrys* and *very glads*, therefore, of letters, are not to be laughed at, as merely absurd accounts of feelings changing every minute with what the writer is talking about, but as expressions of *sympathy* with the friends to whom the letter is going.

We hope they have wished to hear from us; we are sorry, therefore, that we have not written before. They have told us they are well, and we assure them that we rejoice in their comfort; and we tell them our own little bits of news, not that the news is always worth telling, but that we want their fellow-feeling for what has pleased, grieved, or amused ourselves. We desire that they should dance when we pipe to them, and weep when we mourn.

It is very true that letter-writing, like conversation, may be turned to bad purposes. We can tattle and be ill-natured on paper as easily as in what we say, and with worse result; for the written letter remains, and may make mischief afterwards. But

that is no real argument against it. People ought to learn to use things for good, and not for evil; and that letter-writing can be used for great good, who can doubt, who recollects that St. Paul not only wrote his best advice and reproof to his convert friends in letters, but poured out in them his own holiest thoughts and hopes?

But, not to speak of such very serious matters, there is no doubt that these chit-chat communications are capital things for keeping up what politicians call "friendly relations" between friends and relations, and that this is a desirable object. Oh, dear, dear, dear! how easy it is to be forgotten!—"forgotten as a dead man out of mind"—if one shuts oneself out from the sympathy of other people, by neither wishing for theirs, nor giving them our own in return.

As it is, what an hour of interest the post-hour is, in all civilized places! and of what unbounded delight to the young folks when it brings anything for *them*. So much is always expected from the little sealed document, and nothing ever feared, for who writes to them of sorrow or care? The gravest thing they are liable to receive is some little bit of advice, but it falls in so gently with the other contents of the letter, that it never jars as a solitary rebuke might do. And how the other little ones always cluster round the happy receiver of a letter, and listen for the last news as well as the last kind words of the writer; for there is sure to be a message all round for the whole party. At least, there always

was in Aunt Judy's letters, who had a thought and a word for each; and one of whose objects in promising to write, was to keep up their love and interest, and so retain her hold upon them for good. But she had another object in view also. Now that they had lost her company at home, she wanted to send them a little amusement from time to time to make amends for her absence.

How fortunate, then, it was, that just as she had exhausted her accounts of the place where she was staying, and its inhabitants, domestic animals included, an incident occurred at home which formed the ground-work of something scarcely less entertaining than one of her spoken stories.

A letter from No. 4, who could not properly be ranked with the little ones, but was in a sort of transition state, related that she and No. 8 had taken a walk together to a village some distance off, in the midst of which was an old-fashioned green, altogether raised above the road which went round it, and protected by a sunk fence-wall, in which here and there at opposite corners there were a few stone-steps, up which the passengers got on the green.

The green was a very large one, and the villagers kept both donkeys and geese upon it, so, of course, no one could cross it without being liable to encounter some of the poor creatures who were expected to make their dinners off its closely-nibbled grass.

No. 4's account of her crossing it with No. 8, on the occasion just mentioned, was as follows:—

"I had such fun yesterday! We wanted some ribbon for No. 8's hat, and couldn't get it here, so he and I walked to Scorton; and of course we had to cross the green, and I do think there were more geese than ever. Such ridiculous creatures! They no sooner beheld us, than they began to cackle away in the most absurd manner. For my part, I thought they were calling out for a better pasturing-ground, or a good stubble-field, but No. 8 was quite frightened, and wouldn't listen to anything I said. He took hold, first of one of my hands, then of the other, and asked if they would not *bite!* I laughed immensely, and then he would go on faster and faster, and at last began to run, but some geese came up from the other side, and went hiss, hiss, cackle, cackle, waddling after us as fast as they could, till No. 8 actually cried. I told him nobody was worth anything who couldn't say Bo to a goose, but it was of no use. He declared they were nasty, horrid things, and he hated them; and so he went on crying till we got off the green, and I really was ashamed to let him go into the shop, so I took him to old Hannah's to dry his eyes first. But what do you think? The old goose—(*she* really *is* a goose!)—took him on her knee, and said the dear lovey was quite right!! they *were* nasty, horrid things!!! and always put *her* 'all of a tremmle' when she had to go over the green!!!! She should

like to wring all their necks—that she should—for frightening her dear lovey with their cackling! What had *they* got to chatter about, stupid creatures, she should like to know? . . . And more such stuff, till *dear lovey* felt himself quite a martyr, as well as a genius, for having run away. Of course, after this, nothing would induce him to cross the green when we were going back, so we had to go all the way round by the road in the mud. Do, dear Aunt Judy, send him a good scolding!"

. . . . . .

A few days afterwards the postman brought to the house, among other letters, one almost as big as a cheese-plate, and instead of being some stupid official communication for papa, from the Charity Commissioners or Committee of Council on Education, or some dull thing of that sort, it proved to be actually a letter directed to No. 8 himself. Of course that young gentleman felt himself as important as a prime-minister when it was put into his hands, and even coloured with delight as he broke the immense seal, and proceeded to examine the contents of the envelope.

What a wonderful business it was! There was a little note, to be sure, which came out easily enough, but there was such a thick packet besides; and it was so tightly fixed in the envelope, it was hardly possible to extract it. At all events, No. 8's fat, agitated little fingers seemed unable to accomplish it without the aid of No. 6, who was delighted to help No. 8, and gratify her own curiosity at the

same time. But a curious blank fell on the whole party when the thick packet, on being drawn forth at last, proved to be sealed as the envelope had been, and directed as follows:—

"For No. 8.

"But not to be opened till the evening, and then to be read aloud by No. 1."

However, there it was, and there was no remedy; and the small note said further, that the large packet must be put on the mantel-piece, and not be touched until No. 1 read it to them at the hour when Aunt Judy generally told her stories.

BUT!—and this but was written in capital letters —it was only to be read at all on condition that all the party had done their lessons satisfactorily to Nos. 1 and 4!

What a but that was! No. 8 didn't know how he felt! He was so pleased that the packet had come, but so disappointed that he mightn't open it; so curious to know what was inside, but so sorry its being opened depended upon how he did his lessons. In short, he was in a complete muddle as he looked up at the mantel-piece, in the middle of which No. 1 had meantime placed the mysterious packet.

And it must be owned, that both she and No. 4 had secret fears that the curiosity and excitement might prevent No. 8 from being able to do his lessons at all.

Whether they therefore gave him rather easier ones than usual, or he had a steadier head than they

gave him credit for, remains unknown; but, somehow or other, Aunt Judy's scheme worked wonderfully well. All was steadiness and good behaviour in the morning, and in the evening all was delight and expectation. At last the hour arrived, and the party assembled round the fire, and No. 1 opened the packet.

Of course she gave the contents a brief glance, just to find out the sort of thing she was going to read, and the little ones noticed that, while doing so, she looked very much inclined to laugh, which tantalized them so much, that No. 7 murmured out an impressive "Do begin, No. 1!"

"In a moment," was No. 1's reply; "but you must first of all understand what this paper is about. It is the conversation of a goose—a real goose, I mean—living on a green like the one at Scorton; in fact, it is just what a goose on Scorton-green might say if he could speak, and so know how to say it. How shall you like it do you think?"

All except No. 8 shouted that they were sure it would be delightful; but he, poor fellow, kept a profound silence, and looked sadly shy and sheepish. But as no one noticed this—no, not even No. 4, although she was brimful of fun at the very thought of what was coming—he quickly recovered himself, and, very soon after the reading began, was among the heartiest of the laughers.

The paper was as follows, its title being—

THE GOOSE.

"Of all the feathered fowls that be,
The Goose must be preferred;
There is so much of nutriment
In that weak-minded bird."

Author unknown.

SCENE.—*A raised village green, with steps up to it, on opposite sides. Numerous geese browsing thereupon, and occasional passengers walking across.*

Enter a lady and little boy. Goose runs after them.

"Cackle, cackle, cackle! Good-morning! You're a human being, I suppose. I only suppose, of course, for there's so little of you to be seen, one cannot be quite sure. But then no other creatures, that I know of, hide themselves in rags and jags and top-knots, in that ridiculous fashion. What bags of petticoats you have fastened yourself up in, to be sure! It's an odd thing you should be so fond of looking every shape in the world but your own! But it's been the whim of your race all their lives. You've made figures of fun of yourselves ever since the world began. I don't find fault, mind; don't be hurt at what I say. Nature has not gifted you as she has us . . . .

"Cackle, cackle, cackle! And that's a small human being by your side, of course. A sort of

gosling-man. Good-day to you, young Sir! How do you like this beautiful green of ours? Eh?—What's that you're saying?—*Look at that horrid old goose!* Oh, indeed! that's your enlightened idea of a goose, is it? Now I should just wish to ask you a question. How should you like to go to bed to-night without your pillow? Not at all, I suspect. How you would grumble, and how you would cry! So you see you can't very well do without the *horrid old goose's* feathers. Do you hear? Are you not ashamed of yourself? There's nothing worse than being ungrateful. Think of that when you lay your head on the pillow to-night! It's stuffed with goose-feathers, little boy, and you'd be very sorry to have straw instead; and you ought to say 'thank you, thank you, thank you, kind bird, for your nice soft down and feathers,' instead of shouting after me, *Look at that horrid old goose!* . .

'What do I hear, Madam?—you with the odds and ends flying about you—you, asking him if he cannot say *Bo* to a goose?—Cackle, cackle, cackle! Say *Bo* if you like! I'm of an older family than you are, and can afford to be jeered at. Not that it's lady-like to be jeering at anybody. But it makes no difference to me; my position is too well known. Which were in the world first, birds or men? There! Think of that next time you feel conceited about your pedigree! Cackle, cackle, cackle! Geese lived before women. You can't say *Bo* to that. Why are you people always in such a hurry, I wonder? I don't see anybody

driving you, so why should you go so fast? And this is a very nice green to be upon. See, there's the inn on one side, with the shoulder-of-mutton sign as like as life; and the doctor's house on the other; and many nice houses besides, all round. And the doctor's going to give a dinner-party to-day, and his kitchen's too small to do all the cooking in, so the cook at the inn is going to help. They've been going backwards and forwards all the morning. Won't you stay and see the fun? I'm in great spirits and talk to-day, and you're quite among friends here, and I've a thousand things I want to say, but people are so busy, there is no getting them to listen. Do go a little slower, please! Swing yourself round from side to side at each step, as you see me do, and you'll fall into a much nicer pace, and I shall have time to say my say . . .

"No, you won't? Very well. You're gone. Good-by to you. You're not much worth talking to, after all.

[*Exeunt lady and child, and enter lawyer up the steps.*

"Oh, here's another coming up the steps, and I'm just in time. A man, too, and with a blue bag under his arm—a lawyer, then. Well! of all people, we've the greatest claim upon them . . . . Cackle, cackle, cackle! Good morning, Sir. We're as fresh as ever, you see. Race not worn out yet, and always *at* your service, and *in* your service, I hope. These nice greens just suit us, you observe, and we see a good deal of the world here, too.

How are you? Thriving, I hope. Do turn your head this way, and *do* walk a little slower. Are you *always* in such a hurry to get your business done? Don't be hurt—I only ask. Somebody's waiting for a will, perhaps. But you can say a word as you walk. Tell me, how *were* the quills last year? Firm as ever?—or have you taken to steel? Ah! that, I own, is a sad let-down to us. But perhaps you are a quill-driver yet. Nasty things those steel-pens at the best. Scratch the paper, and pick up hairs, and make you write their way instead of your own.

"What?—*Drive those geese away, you boys—brutes!*

"Oh! you ungracious rascal; is that the way you treat an old friend? There were no steel-pens when *you* were young, old gentleman; and it was then you learnt to draw out your six-and-eightpenny bills, till they sometimes covered over a landed estate. Think of the quills you made pens of, and nibbed down to their stumps, in those days! Think how your fingers tightened over them, as you filled up one long column after another, and settled what you and the future Mrs. Squaretoes would do with the money when you got it, or all you could get of it after the bill had been taxed. You let yourself be helped by *the brutes* when there was no other help to be had. Your bill wouldn't have been quite as easily read, if you had been forced to write it with a skewer, I fancy, instead of *a brute's* feather, eh?

"As it was, the difficulty was not in the reading it. '*To calling on you in your own house to inquire why you had not called on me in mine: six-and-eightpence.*' '*To finding you in my house on my return, and telling you I had called on you in yours: six-and-eightpence.*' '*To informing you on the same occasion that I could not confer with you just then on business, as a gentleman was waiting below by appointment: six-and-eightpence.*' There! isn't that like? Not that I mean to say you never wrote anything more useful than that, Squaretoes. But when people are ungrateful, like you, they make other people impertinent, like me. But, dear me, you go faster over the ground than the woman did. You'll be across the green in two minutes, and I have not had half my talk out. Now, do be just for once. But that we were never out of your hands night and day, you would not have been a hundredth part of the man you are, would you? Then why not own it like a man, and make a bow to us as you go by. It is so sneaking to make use of people, and benefit by them, and not even owe them thanks. [*Exit lawyer down the steps.*

"You're gone, are you? Well, I'm sure I owe you no thanks for civility. But I know how it is, old Red-tape! You have taken to steel, and think you can do without us. But you can't, you can't! Mrs. Squaretoes *will* sleep on a feather-bed yet, in spite of you!

Enter stout woman up the steps, with large pan.

"Oh! oh! who's this, I wonder? What a stout old dear! More lining than petticoats here. And what a huge pan she's carrying! Goodness! I smell giblet-soup. It's the cook from the inn, I do believe, and there's going to be goose for dinner at the doctor's. Now, then, if she isn't civil, there's no hope!

"Cackle, cackle, cackle! Madam, what a fine dish, and how well you carry it!

[*Cook looks at goose and starts.*

"What!—you start? I wonder why. What, frightened? No! that *is* a joke. With giblet-soup in your arms, to be frightened at *me*. See now, I'm the quietest creature in the world, only I like a bit of talk; and when people are so useful to their neighbours, they've a right to chat a little about it now and then. See, I can keep up nicely with you, you go so slow. I say, Mrs. Cook, do just tell me if I'm right. Is that soup going across to the doctor's? See, I'll come quite close, and then you need not speak loud . . . . [*Cook screams.*

"What, screaming! Why, what can that be for? Is anything the matter? Can I help?

[*Cook screams again.*

"Again? What can it be?

[*Cook stumbles and falls.*

"She's down, I declare, and there go all the giblets over the grass! Oh! dear me, it's a pitiful sight to see oneself stewed and browned out of all

knowledge! And there lies the old lady all among them still! Won't anybody come and pick her up? I'll call.

"Cackle, cackle, cackle! There come some people. That's all right. But what is she shrieking now?—*It'll bite! I know it will!*—Bite, you stupid old creature! Why, when did you ever see a goose's tooth? And you've seen plenty of us, I know. You cook us every year of your life. *I* know, *I* know! Michaelmas-day, apple-sauce and mustard. And haven't you just turned us into soup? There! she's up and off. She can't listen to sense. They've got her back to the inn.

[*Cook gives boys a penny to drive goose away. A rush accordingly.*

"Ah! you long-legged rascals; you'd pelt your grandmother out of house and home for a spice-cake. I'm off—I'm off. You needn't run so fast. But I shan't forget *you*, old lady. I'll hiss next time you come across, that I will! Well, well! The foolishest creature in the world, next to a young woman, is an old one, that's certain.

Enter two young ladies, talking, up the steps.

"There! one no sooner thinks of a thing than it appears. Here are two of the pretty dears I was speaking about. How they toss their heads, and how they talk! Gabble, gabble, gabble! I never heard such a chatter and a fuss. I must ask what it's all about.

"Cackle, cackle, cackle! Good-day to you,

dears. May one inquire what's the last news from home? Feather-beds gone out with you yet? There's a strange love for being uncomfortable abroad in the world just now, I'm told. Feather-beds sent to the garrets, and horse-hair in all the best bed-rooms. Straw 'll come in next, I suppose —after that, plain boards. Ha! ha! why don't you laugh? It's a very good joke, I'm sure. How you turn away, and won't give the poor goose a single kind look. But never mind. You have not come to years of discretion yet. Oh! you *have* turned round. I'm so glad. What are you saying? You *wish the constable would clear the green of those cackling geese. You never heard such a row as the creatures make.* Well, that is excellent, certainly, considering the gabbling you keep up yourselves. How blind we are to our own defects. But seriously now; do you really think your language better than ours?—ours, that has been good enough to last unchanged from the deluge downwards, while yours is a miserable hotch-potch, borrowed from a dozen others, and made up of shreds and scraps, like a patchwork quilt. There! What can you say to that? When you speak a word, you can't tell what country it comes from till you've hunted it down through a dozen dictionaries. I dare say you didn't think I knew that. You always do forget what you should remember. You don't think about the pens that have scribbled, scribbled, scribbled at those dictionaries from one generation to another, and are at it yet; and if it wasn't

for them, you would scarcely have a language to call your own.

"Now, why can't you be amiable and good-natured? You wish to be thought so. Just turn your faces to me instead of to each other, and let me hear the fun. I guess you're going to tea at the doctor's this evening—white muslins and pink look like it—and you'll play, and sing, and smile. Very good, very good. Only just ask the doctor's wife what the music-master said, the first thing this morning, when he was going to dust the piano before tuning it. I know!—*Have you such a thing as a goose's wing, Ma'am, if you please?*—There! You didn't expect that, did you? You didn't think I had ever had my wing in a musical pie, eh? And yonder I see the music-master coming up the steps; and as you are both of you so wrapt up in yourselves, I shall—cackle, cackle, cackle—make my best bow, and turn back with him.

Enter music-master up the steps.

"Cackle, cackle, cackle! Good-day. You're the very man of all others I want to see. I've longed for a chat with you for an age. I want to talk over old times, my boy. Old times, when it was we who made the strings vibrate to your great-grandmother's playing, when she sent Boccherini's sonatas through your great-grandfather's heart! I've heard of it! I know all about it! My great-great-grandmother's great-great-grandmother told her, and she told me. Hammers for hitting the

strings were not invented then. A split quill—a *goose*-quill, old boy!—tweaked them instead; and twang they went, and all the people called out 'Bravo!' I know it's all changed now, with these soft pianofortes. But what are they, after all, but spinets with hammers instead of quills? Things do improve, but old times should not be forgotten.

"How rude you are, to whistle while I'm talking! It looks as if you had made up your mind to learn nothing fresh. A very stupid decision, Mr. Music-Master, and one you wouldn't like your pupils to come to. Confess, now, you never saw a spinet in your life, and knew nothing about it till I told you. I am sure of it; it's my knowing more than you that makes you so cross. It always does make people cross—conceited people, however—wise ones are glad to learn. [*Exit music-master.*

"There! he's gone; and a good riddance, too. It's a strange thing civility should be so scarce. All one wants is to have one's services acknowledged.

Enter the doctor.

"Ah! but here is one more happy chance. I have the doctor fast, that is a fact. He has dined upon a roasted *me* to begin with, and then I know a thing or two.

"Cackle, cackle, cackle! A good afternoon to our modern Esculapius—in other words, good-day, Doctor! How's our pulse to-day? Dinner digested, eh? You roasted the goose at home, I suppose? The soup, I know, was lost; you'll find the giblets on the green, if you look for them, unless, indeed,

the dogs have had the luck before you. But never mind them—nasty things cold, and a little dyspeptic in their action. Ah! Doctor, how mortal we all are, to be sure. But don't look so gloomy over it. We who are permitted to help our fellow-creatures have many consolatory thoughts. What are you quickening your pace for? Nobody has sent after you. You might afford me a few cozy words after that croup affair last week. *We* know what it was saved Betty's child, don't we? Your powders were all very well—just a little magnesia flavoured with aniseed—ingenious idea enough; but you know what saved the child's life. Come, come, do laugh it out with me. I bear no malice, and never tell tales; but I know you have got a bottle of goose-grease in your pocket at this moment, ticketed with Latin outside, '*Anseris Liquamen.*'

[*Doctor shouts Pshoo! pshoo!*

"Pshoo! pshoo! What does that mean? Latin for 'go away,' I'm afraid! But I shall do no such thing, you ungracious gallipot! And as to the bottle of goose-grease, if you haven't got it in your pocket, you ought to have, that's all! And if *you* didn't give it to Betty's child, the old nurse did, and was the better doctor of the two. So now take home that bit of news, and profit by it! But no, you'll profit by nothing in life now but pounds, shillings, and pence. There you go, as full of conceit as your bottles are of pump-water—*Aqua pompaginis*, I mean—the dearest medicine in your shop, old Culpepper, eh? [*Exit doctor.*

"Yes, yes! run down the steps; but we can take our revenge, remember! We can starve and grow thin, every one of us, and then there'll be no more goose-grease, and the children will have the croup, and die of it, and all the blame will be laid upon you. Do you hear? You'd better be civil while there's goose-grease to be had!

Enter artist up the steps.

"Oh dear! oh dear! I'm afraid I was talking sadly too loud for the delicate nerves of this fine gentleman! His brow quite contracted as I spoke. What a large portfolio he's carrying, and a paint-box in the other hand. Well, I've had so many disappointments, I don't know what to think; but he ought to be friendly if he dabbles in water-colours. That's a very mild eye of his, too; but yet I don't know how it is; he gives a very odd look our way.

"Cackle, cackle, cackle! Good afternoon, dear Sir—stranger, perhaps I ought to say; only artists are strangers nowhere. Citizens of the world. Nature the world, they its citizens. Rights of property, and all that political stuff, mere nonsense to people who cast their eyes over the landscape, and feel all their own that they can see and pourtray.

"Come, that's well said for a goose, surely! What! not a smile? Do you never smile, my pale friend? Never laugh, even at yourself? Only frown? More's the pity. I laugh—even at myself—and grow fat. It's the shortest plan. Saves

other people the trouble, and doesn't vex oneself into the bargain.

"But what's the use of my talking? You're thinking of something else, and don't even hear that I'm near you! Well, really, this would try anybody's patience! I say, Mr. Artist, you're very rude! And I won't believe you don't really hear. It's all sham. You think it's a fine thing to look as if you were meditating. But you *shall* hear, dabbler. Cackle, cackle, cackle! hiss, hiss, hiss! You *shall* hear! I'm determined you shall!

"Open your paint-box, Sir, and look at your brushes. Look at your best sables, fitches, and camel's-hairs. Much good you could do with the hairs, if it wasn't for the *cases* they're inclosed in! There! Look at them and—think of me! It's the worst wish I wish you—think of me! I scorn your thanks, but—think of me! Not that that's all! Oh dear no! I know as well as you do, that Michael Angelo, and half the good artists of old times, made plenty of other use of us. Didn't always draw with chalk, or pencil, or paint. *You* know! Plenty of the drawings remain, and it's a pity you don't take pattern by them. Ah! if *he* had been alive—but no, if he *had* been alive, he very likely would not have had the grace to say 'thank you,' any more than you do. You 'men are a little breed,' and all of a sort, gentle and simple, all ungrateful alike! [*Exit artist.*

"I thought as much. I knew he durstn't stay any longer. Far too refined, of course, to have any

sympathy with a goose. Poor dear me! I could almost fancy I was tired!

Rush of boys from evening-school, who scour across the green, chasing geese as they go.

"Ah! ah! ah! Cackle, cackle, cackle! Young rascals!—(cackle.) I've no more breath!—(cackle.) Ah! graceless dogs—(cackle)—think of the potato pop-guns—(cackle)—you've had from us—(cackle)—and the jumping-frogs—(cackle)—out of our very breast-bones—(cackle)—and the moveable hands—(cackle)—out of our dead feet!—(cackle.)

"What a wicked world this is! (cackle.) I could almost wish—(cackle)—my time was come—(cackle)—for giblet-soup—(cackle)—or Yorkshire pie.

"And yonder goes the parson—(cackle)—with the registers under his arm—(cackle.) And I've no breath left—(cackle)—to ask him how we're doing his sermon this week—(cackle)—or to remind him he ought to say 'thank you'—(cackle)—to us about those old books—(cackle)—for if they had not been written in those days—(cackle)—how could he get the half-crowns he does now—(cackle)—for referring to them—(cackle)—besides sixpence, if he chooses—(cackle)—for every back year.

"And I wanted to ask him, too, if the tithe-goose—(cackle)—happened to be tender this year—(cackle.) Oughtn't he to be grateful if it was?

"And if there isn't—(cackle)—how I wish I could waddle after him!—(cackle)—*my lord* cross-

ing the green—(cackle)—to catch the parson—(cackle)—and never once thinking when he looks at us—(cackle)—how much he owes us—(cackle.) Well! the loss is his, and not mine—(cackle)—that I can't get at him to tell him all about it—(cackle)—for he ought to know, as a piece of national information—(cackle)—that if it wasn't for his letters patent of nobility, with the king's sign-manual—(cackle)—his title wouldn't be worth a rush—(cackle)—to say nothing of the parchment deeds of the big estate. People should learn in this world—(cackle)—to know their friends by sight. But they're all alike. Lords and ladies, authors, artists, and cooks—(cackle)—doctors, parsons, lawyers, musicians, and ignorant little boys—all just alike—(cackle)—all turn up their noses at those they're beholden to.

"I'm getting better by degrees. But what a run that was! It has almost finished my—(cackle)—career!

"Oh dear! who is this little midge of a girl, with long curls and a drooping hat? She's coming up the steps. I hope she won't run after me—(cackle)—oh! I hope not! No, she won't; she looks very quiet. She's got a book in her hand, and I'm too much tired to talk, and she owes me nothing but her pillow, so I shan't trouble myself about her. One can't talk about pillows for ever."

[*Goose nibbles grass without looking up. Enter little girl, and looks at goose and stops. Goose takes no notice. Little girl sits down, and says,—*

"I shall read you a pretty story, poor goose."

[*Opens Mrs. Trimmer's History of Rome, and begins to read aloud the story of the geese who saved the capitol.*

Goose leaves off eating, gradually tucks up one leg, buries bill in the down of his back, and drops asleep. Little girl reads on, adding at the end, as if reading still,—

"So you see, dear Goose, how proud you ought to be, and what a good thing it is to cackle and talk till you do somebody good."

[*Lifts up her eyes, and sees goose's posture.*

"Why, goose!—you're asleep!"

[*Runs off; and the shades of evening descend over the village green.*"

There was a pause of a few seconds after No. 1 ceased reading, and then the voice of No. 7 was heard in a delightful murmur, observing that it was "awfully good!" after which all the tongues were let loose in its praise and in recalling the different jokes.

One thought it was so capital about those giblets, and the cook thinking a goose could bite, at the very idea of which all laughed again, and none more than No. 8, although, only a few days before, he had entertained the very same idea himself.

No. 6's chief concern was, that the poor goose *should* have been asleep when he was being praised. How pleased he would have been if he had but heard what the little girl said! After which several

others exclaimed "poor goose!" in a tender tone, as if some sort of pity began to steal over them for the ill-used bird to whom so many people owed so much.

Now this was exactly the effect Aunt Judy intended her goose-letter to produce; so nothing could have answered its purpose better.

"Nevertheless," said No. 1, "nobody need wait till a goose is dead, before they begin to find out his merits." And then she proceeded to tell them that, according to published accounts, no birds were more intelligent, or more affectionate in disposition, than these poor despised waddlers whom everybody laughs at. One particular anecdote of a gander who took a devoted fancy to his master, a farmer, and would go out with him when he went to plough, walking up and down the field as he did, was charming; and one or two others of goose-love and goose-wit so touching and surprising, that it seemed hardly possible to believe the poor creatures did not reason and think like human beings.

And so the evening passed, and one thing they all agreed upon in conclusion, namely, that *they* were all as much indebted to the geese as anybody, if, that is to say, Aunt Judy had not taken to steel, like the lawyer, when she wrote.

Children are very funny creatures. Before they came down next morning, the little ones had talked all the matter over, and discovered that Aunt Judy had left out "oh! ever so many things" she might

have put in. There was the goose with the golden eggs, and the goose in the old nursery song,—

"Goosey, goosey, gander,
Where would you wander?"

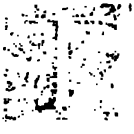
and Luther's goose; and Grimm's geese, who begged the fox to let them say their prayers before he ate them up, and who are cackling away still, for anything anybody knows to the contrary. And then, the old English war-arrows were tipped with goose-feathers. Besides—

But here mamma, who was half deafened, as she sat at breakfast, by the goose facts and fancies that were being poured out all at once round her, entreated the little ones to stop, assuring them that after they went to bed the night before, she had read Aunt Judy's goose-letter herself, and she thought it was a perfect treasure of a letter for such a parcel of geese as themselves. To this the little ones agreed most warmly, but No. 7 took the opportunity of inquiring why, if geese really were such very clever birds, silly people were always called geese?

Here was a knotty point, indeed; and mamma could only suggest that it must be because they had got into such a terrible habit of chattering and gabbling at all times and seasons, and whether the people they talked to liked it or not. "Now suppose, for instance," said she, "that we were all of us going across Scorton-green. Good-natured as I hope we are, we might not exactly *wish* to be run after, and chattered to, even by so amiable and saga-

cious a creature as a goose, eh? What do you think?" No. 8 grinned perceptibly, and the rest laughed outright. "Not but what Aunt Judy has shown us they have plenty to say for themselves if they could but speak, poor fellows, which is one good thing at any rate. But there is an old idea, that great talkers have small wits, and so I fear geese will always have the credit of being silly, let them be ever so wise, unless they leave off gabbling so fast. But they are nice old creatures, and very tender-hearted, and we have great comfort out of them every day of our lives, and a lesson into the bargain in this tiresome talking of theirs. For if wise people put their neighbours out of patience by talking too much, how *very* careful the rest of the world ought to be, eh? There, now! my sermon is over, so I will tell you of something else Aunt Judy did not put into her letter—the *Royal Game of Goose!* I once saw an old copy of it myself, and should be very glad to see another. It was a round game, and was played with dice, or a teetotum; and everybody ought to remember it by Goldsmith's lines in "The Traveller," describing the room of a village inn,—

> "The pictures placed for ornament and use;
> The twelve good rules, the *Royal Game of Goose.*"



AUNT SALLY'S LIFE.

"Ah, what shall I be at fifty
Should Nature keep me alive?"
TENNYSON'S *Maud.*

THE next communication from Aunt Judy was in consequence of the following postscript to a letter she received from No. 4:—

"P. S.—I had almost forgotten the most important news of all. Just think! The boys have dug up mother's old doll again, and she is being painted and done up for an Aunt Sally. She is to have a frilled cap on, and a pipe in her mouth, and to be fixed on the stump of a tree. Can't you just imagine how she will look, staring out of her huge black eyes at all the world and his wife, as complacently as if this was just the thing she was born to? Act fifth, scene last, surely, of poor old Blackamoor's life. By the way, what fun it would be, if you would write it—her life, I mean. The adventures of a doll half a century old. And the little ones are so fond of her, they would be enchanted. And so should I, for I love the poor old thing. She has been buried and dug up again

three times at least. And now there is quite an excitement of delight because of her revival as Aunt Sally. Do think about it, please."

Aunt Judy did what she was asked; she thought about it; the result of which was, that in due time there arrived one of the large letters, addressed to No. 4, and when the enclosure within was opened, it proved to be a manuscript, headed, "The Life of Aunt Sally, *alias* Blackamoor, *alias* Rosabella, *alias* Amelia, as related by herself."

Shouts of delight followed the reading aloud of this title; so much so, that going on was for a time impossible; but when composure was restored, No. 4 proceeded to begin the life aloud, every eye fixed upon her in eager expectation.

And it opened thus:—

"It is a fine thing to be fifty years old, and not only be of use still, but able to make oneself positively agreeable. Don't you think so, my young friends?"

No. 4 paused and looked round, but the "young friends'" faces were two degrees less bright than a minute before, and groans and exclamations broke out: "What a horrid idea! Poor old creature, it sounds quite dreadful! I wish Aunt Judy had said forty or thirty. Surely thirty is old enough for anything, and I can't bear Blackamoor to be more. Are you *quite* sure about the figure?"

No. 4 was perfectly certain. Nay, she turned the letter round and showed the terrible 5 in all its clearness. It was far too well written for a mistake to be possible.

No. 6 sighed, and remarked in a melancholy voice, "Fifty years is half a century, isn't it, No. 4? Only think of a doll half a century old! It seems so odd!"

But as no one had anything further to say, No. 4 was requested to "go on" if she pleased. They hoped there would be *some* fun nevertheless!

So she read on as follows:—

"Well, my dears, I cannot hear what answer you make to my question; but whatever you may think, I can assure you positively that it is a very nice thing to be able to please other people as one grows old; it proves that one is still of use. So I am glad to find myself turned to such good account as to be made an Aunt Sally of, and played with. It's a roughish sort of game, I admit, and not the kind of thing I was accustomed to in my best days; but I am well seasoned by this time, and can bear more rubs with a quiet temper than I could have done then. One lives and learns, you know, and there's nothing one learns plainer as one grows old, than the folly of making a fuss about trifles. If I was crusty and cross now, think how easily I could vex myself and everybody else, by grumbling at young folks' impertinence, and making out that I was ill-treated. But as I take it quite easy, and am glad to be of use, both they and I are pleased, and all goes smooth. Now I did meet with some real impertinence a few days ago. A little girl came up to me on the lawn, stared a bit, and then said, "You hideous old creature, I wonder where

you were born? In some dusty out-of-the-way shop where everything was ugly, I'm sure."

"Wasn't that silly? If I had been able to speak, I should have called out, 'You ignorant little goose, go home and learn Mangnall's questions, and find out where wood comes from.' That would have made the saucy young lady look rather foolish, I suspect.

"Then, too, as to my being hideous; hideousness is really a matter of taste, and tastes vary according to the fashion of the day and country. I was thought lovely once, before the new varieties of dolls came up. So I sit quite easy at being called hideous now. People have changed their tastes, that's all. *I* have not changed in any material point. It is true I am a little altered outwardly from what I once was, but nothing to what the young lady will be at my age. Wood wears out less than flesh, I suspect. Think of her now, a jaunty little girl with dimpled cheeks and a pork-pie hat, and then think of her a tall old lady in a bonnet and spectacles. Oh dear! oh dear! people who sit in greenhouses should be very careful how they throw stones!

"But about my beauty. If large black eyes, rosy cheeks, a delicate line of lips, small nose and curls, are beautiful, I was beautiful, that is certain. Not perfect, of course; nobody is. You are none of you perfect, my young friends, eh? And I own that my yellow leathern arms were rather too short, and too small in proportion to my body. Besides,

their being stuffed with bran was very inconvenient, for if a child happened to poke a hole in them, out it ran, and the leather fell flat, and one looked like an officer with an empty coat sleeve. Not a bad thing to be like certainly, in some respects; but it didn't look well for a doll who had never been in the wars. Then, too, my poor legs were nothing but thin slips of wood, like very ill-made flat rulers, with a sort of knob at the bottom for a foot; but what did that matter? The legs were not intended to be seen; and what the eye doesn't see, the heart doesn't grieve. None of my many mistresses ever complained of them, and they had this one great merit, that if they were broken, a fresh pair could be put on as easily as possible. Now if any of you, my dears, can say as much for your legs, so much the better for you!

"But the truth is, I was thought beautiful because I was loved, and that is the utmost that anybody can attain to. For instance, my first little mistress was so fond of me, that one day she put me in a chair to sit for my picture. I shall never forget her telling me to keep very quiet till it was done, and to look her full in the face. I can tell you I did as I was bid. I neither moved nor took my eyes off her the whole time. And as she had just had a new paint-box given her, the picture was coloured: think of that! She showed it me when it was done. There were my jet eyes and black curls, and brilliant cheeks, and thin liny mouth drawn up at each end into a smile—done to the

life. At least so said nurse, to whom the picture was given.

"But there was more than the picture. The dear little child looked at me and it, till she grew quite grave, and began to ask nurse what she thought would become of everything at the end of the world; whether dolls, and books, and all the pretty things she liked so much, would be destroyed. To which nurse gave two answers. First, 'She was sure she didn't know.' Then, 'She supposed so, of course.' After which the little girl looked graver still, left off painting and took me on her knee, where she nursed me for a long, long time, and whispered to me that we would always keep together.

"And, next day, she got a pencil, and wrote on the back of the picture a sort of account of me and it. Let me see! I think I can remember it if I try. Yes; this was it:—

"'This is a doll. It was once a tree, and lived in a wood, and birds sat on the top of it and sang. Then came carpenters and cut it down, and made it into a doll, and (perhaps) a coffin as well. So when the doll's mistress is grown old enough to die, there will be the coffin ready for both, and then all the tree will come together again, and birds will sit outside the grave and sing.'

"When the little girl finished this writing, she read it aloud to me, and I thought it, oh! *so* beautiful! But nurse seemed vexed, and said, 'Oh dear, Missy, how could you put such things down? though it's very pretty, I know.'

"Little Missy looked puzzled, but that was all; and she thought no more about it afterwards. But nurse hid the picture away in a drawer, and showed it to nobody, till one day she brought it out for a gentleman to see who had been coming to the house for two or three weeks; the doctor, in fact, of whom she had made quite a friend. I did not like him so well myself, but how could it be expected? He ordered my little mistress to bed the very first day he came, so she couldn't play with me any longer, and I was angry. Now don't blame me! If any of you had been dolls, I dare say you would have been angry too. How was I to know she was ill? And it is not very easy to be patient when you don't know the why and wherefore of what is done. Anyhow, angry I was, and stared angrily at the doctor out of my wicker cradle every time he passed by, but he took no notice whatever; and I hated him very much, and thought myself greatly ill-used, of course.

"It is very candid of me to tell you this, mind, for I soon knew that the doctor did right, and I was not ill-used at all, and therefore that my anger was unjust. Ah! when I first found all that out, I felt ashamed to think how selfish I had been. But it's a long time before one learns to judge rightly of anything, and especially of what is done to oneself. Indeed, I doubt if one is ever impartial enough to do that. But I can tell you the real truth about it all now.

"While I lay grumbling at everybody in my

wicker cradle, my poor little mistress was far too ill in bed to have been able to hold me up or play with me, if the doctor had given her leave a dozen times over. There! wasn't that sad? I might well be ashamed! Why, even the baby brother who used so often to sleep with her, was never allowed to be there now. But still somehow I never thought much about all this, till I saw nurse get out the picture of me and cry over it, and show it to the doctor, as I said before.

"And, do you know, he seemed half inclined to cry too, for his voice was quite husky when he said, 'Very, very singular! There is no saying what she might not become, were she to live!'

"At which nurse sobbed out, 'But she won't, Sir, I know she won't.'

"And I began to wonder whether it was possible that such a very little girl had grown old enough to die. You see I did not understand such things.

"And next day I saw still plainer how kind the doctor really was, for that poor little thing had been fretting because she might not have her baby brother with her; and he said at once, 'Will you have Dolly instead, dear? You will not disturb her so easily, you know; she sleeps too sound.'

"Only think of my having hated that man! So I was laid in the bed by my poor little mistress, who looked at me with such a sad sweet smile as I had never seen before, and kissed me, and in a weak thin voice bade me be good and go to sleep, for she

could not play till she was better—a time which never came.

"Well! after a few more days everybody was crying, and people seemed to have forgotten I was in the bed at all, I had been so hid away in the furthest corner. But presently I was thrown on the floor roughly by strange women, who evidently knew nothing about me, and were only vexed because I made a noise in my fall. After which I was picked up and put once more into the wicker cradle. And then I found out what had happened, and that the little girl had really died, for a coffin was brought into the room and she laid in it. And I wondered whether she had guessed right, and it was part of my tree, and whether I should be put in too. For I didn't know then, any more than she did, what I have learnt since—namely, that dolls are made of apple-tree wood and coffins of elm. So I kept hoping to be taken to my dear little friend from hour to hour, and stared at everybody who came near me, to remind them that there I was, quite ready. But nobody even looked into the cradle, and, oh dear, how vexed I was, for, thought I, everybody forgets me; how hard it is!

"They didn't forget me though, so I was wrong again; but one is so hasty when one is young! Still, though they did remember me, it was not in the way I should have liked best; for they popped me, cradle and all, into a large dark closet, covered me up, and left me there for—oh! how shall I measure the time? I cannot, but it seemed very,

very long. Perhaps because at first I could not rest, from vexation at being where I was. That was wise, wasn't it? Did one so much good, eh? to be cross about what one couldn't help. This makes you laugh, I see. Well, I am glad it does, if thinking of what I did wrong ever comes in of use. If, I mean, you are wiser than I was, and learn patience without going through the mistakes I did, first. Do, there's dears! Don't be impatient, for instance, and think yourselves ill-used every time your wishes are thwarted. Don't fancy people dislike you because they don't do everything you wish. And, above all, be contented to be wherever you are put. In nine cases out of ten, whoever put you there, knows better than you do the best place for you. And every place is a good place if you can be of use in it. There! when you are as old as I am, you will know what good advice this is.

"But now you shall hear what became of me afterwards. I suppose I got tired even of being cross at last; for after settling that everybody was heartless and cruel, and that nobody had cared for my little mistress, or they would have made a pet of me, I fell asleep. At all events, I knew nothing more till one day a long time afterwards, the closet door was opened, and nurse herself came in, took me up out of my cradle, and uncovered my face. Oh dear, how she cried, to be sure! And she carried me down-stairs in her arms just as if I had been a baby, and after stopping outside the drawing-

room door to wipe her eyes, she took me in; and there sat the mother of my little mistress, and some children in black, who turned out to be her nieces, and who had lately lost their mother. She wished to be a second mother to them, as far as she could, she said, and they must try and make up to her for the little girl she had lost. So I was given them to be theirs. But when it came to actually putting me into their hands, the poor lady broke down. I think the merely touching me upset her; and then it struck me, all at once, that she was thinking of the other little hands which had handled me last. And then, for the first time, I understood why I had been laid by out of sight for so long; and once more had to be ashamed for having been unjust and selfish.

"I think the children felt sorry for their aunt when she gave me to them, though very likely they could not have told why. Certainly they seemed half afraid to touch me; the second girl especially, who turned her back and began to cry. On which her aunt kissed her, and bade her not do so; for said she, 'It will make me happier to be of use to you all; and the poor doll will be of use again too, you see, so I really like you to have her. To be of use to other people is the only thing worth living for.'

"*There* was a new idea for me, who hitherto had thought so little of anything but my own amusements and comforts. Oh, I assure you what the poor lady said quite startled me. And yet it made

me very happy too. *The poor doll will be of use again too.* I actually *had* been of use, then, once; I was going to be so again; and being of use to other people was the only thing worth living for. Those words became the text-book of my life!

"But I didn't grow wise at once. The new home put all my wisdom out of my head at first, it was so bewildering. The very chatter of three or four young voices kept my head in a whirl. Then they changed my dress, and the style of my wig, and even my name; but this last, I believe, nurse told them they must do. I had been *Amelia* before, now I was to be *Rosabella;* and the children gave a nursery tea-party to celebrate the event, and I was handed round and admired as the new baby.

"This was all very well, and rather amusing to me, who had seen nothing of the sort before; but presently I found out that the change in my life was not for the better in the main. I had been petted before by one mistress with one will; now I had three, and sometimes all the three pulling different ways. Just think of that! I tried to remind myself about being of use, as the lady had said, but what I had to bear was too much for me. Oh dear! how sick I was of being tossed about from one lap to another, everybody clawing hold of me, and wanting to 'have me,' as they called it, at once. It was very affectionate, I dare say, but I don't like affection when it goes worry, worry, worry, without stopping to think whether it can be pleasant or not. I actually, every now and then,

wished myself back in the dark closet again. Indeed, I am obliged to own that I got very impatient, and was always saying to myself how inferior these children were to the one I had known before; what hopeless young bears, &c., &c., &c.; which made me more irritable than I should have been, if I had tried to take things quietly and submit.

"Nevertheless, there was *some* reason for finding fault, for the children did teaze each other amazingly at times, actually as if they had no sense or manners either. For instance, if one wanted to take me up for lessons, another would very likely want to play at my being sick in bed, and the third would insist on carrying me into the garden to make me swing. And each would defend her proposal with so many arguments, I used to wonder they did not talk each other deaf, especially when they all talked together, which was by no means an uncommon case.

"Yet they were fine, intelligent, clever children all the time, poor things, and I lived to owe them a great deal, as you shall hear. We had gone on some time in this confused way, when, one day, their aunt paid them a visit in the nursery. And as she happened to come in in the middle of a squabble, when my head was on one little girl's knees, my legs on those of another, while the third was standing by crying, she understood the whole affair at once.

"And that very evening there arrived a huge parcel for the children, which proved to contain two new dolls, one a large one exactly like myself, only

that her complexion was sallower than mine; indeed, I think we must have been purchased at the same shop; the other a neat, jointed foreigner; a new invention then, which was thought to be a model of ingenuity.

"Of course these dolls came from that kind aunt; who wrote a letter with them, saying that the eldest girl was to have the big one, the youngest the jointed foreigner, and that I was to be the property of the second. This offended me much. I thought I ought to have had the place of honour, and belonged to the eldest. And in my vexation I got hold of a new trouble, viz. that as the new dolls looked so smart and bright, the child who had me would hate me, and so I should never be happy again; and, I added, *of no further use.* Yes, I believe I tried to persuade myself that I was fretting because I should be of use no longer; but conscience obliges me to own that this was not my real trouble, but a jealous feeling about my position in life, and the supposed superiority of others. So I wished the new dolls out of the house, felt very angry with the kind aunt, and would have given anything in the world to find myself once more an only doll, even if I had had a dozen mistresses to toss and tumble me about; for, said I to myself then, 'I was certainly too hasty in finding so much fault; the children meant kindly, and so I ought to have taken it.'

"It was my misfortune, you see, in those days, to be wise just too late. But never mind, I learnt

better at last! My fright was soon over this time, for even before night I found out that I had not done my particular little girl justice. When she put me to bed, she whispered to me as she bent over the cradle, 'Dolly, dear! the new dolls are very gay and pretty, but I like you a great deal better than either of them. I used to like your face so much when you were my cousin's *Amelia*, and now I like you for having been hers, because she was my darling; and I shall teach you all manner of things, for aunt says we ought to keep a school now that we have so many young people to bring up, and I mean you to be very clever some day. Now you are my very own, I shall love you as much as my cousin did.'

"This was pleasant, was it not? Besides, it made me recollect that this was the little girl who had cried when she first saw me, and now I knew why. She and her cousin had been darling friends, and she loved me for her sake. And, oh! miserable grumbler that I had been, this then was the reason of the kind aunt wishing her to have me for her very own! Oh! when was I to be cured of thinking unjust things? Well! I had had many lessons, and I think this last brought all the others to active remembrance. Certainly I now resolved to turn over quite a new leaf:—to take nothing amiss which came from a friend; to think more of being of use than of pleasing myself; and to take little vexations easily. Vexations did come at times, of course, for who is not liable to be irritable and

unreasonable now and then? My queer leathern fingers would sometimes stick in the sleeve of my frock, and it wouldn't come on; or my curls wouldn't lie smooth; or the string of my petticoat broke, just when I was going to be taken out for an airing; or my shoes dropped off those horrid flat-sided feet of mine; and my little mistress got angry; but I stuck to my resolutions, and kept calm. She was my friend, and that was enough. 'It's partly my fault, I know,' said I to myself. 'I'm an awkward creature, and can't help being tiresome. We must forgive and forget trifles.' And so we did, for the pet was soon over, and we were as happy as ever.

"And then the learning; it was really wonderful what the children tucked into us, when they once set about it with a good heart. They had a table to themselves in a corner of the drawing-room, and round this we used to be seated every evening to be taught. I am an old creature now, but I recollect a good many of those lessons yet. One of us learnt the geography of Spain, and traced the Duke of Wellington's battles on the map. Another took to Ireland; and I at one time learnt all the Greek declensions, and part of the first verb; but there, alas! I and my mistress stuck fast. My sallow-faced sister even worked the Hebrew characters on a sampler; for you see we did not confine ourselves to common-places, such as French, arithmetic, &c., but rushed boldly at all sorts of difficulties. The pity was, that we did not go on far enough, for

then we should have been qualified to pass a Government Inspector's Examination; but, somehow or other, whenever anything very hard came, we were always whipped and sent to bed, a sign of course that we were supposed not to be paying proper attention, and therefore couldn't be taught any further then.

"Once or twice it did come into my head on those occasions to wonder whether our mistresses themselves knew any further; but I was ashamed of the suspicion, and always repelled it. Afterwards, however, I found out that this was the secret of the whole affair, and that the whipping was performed merely as a matter of course, to make a proper ending to the lesson.

"Teachers can seldom afford to acknowledge their own ignorance, you know. It wouldn't do. Nevertheless, it was droll, wasn't it? for *us* to be whipped because *they* knew no more; but we didn't mind. I told my companions my former history; and being more experienced than they were, had the pleasure of delivering a little lecture to them on the folly of impatience, and the value of being of use in the world. So we all agreed to take things as they came, and make no complaints. Anyhow, we could congratulate ourselves on being the three best educated dolls in all the country side; and let me tell you, this source of consolation has saved me grief and mortification on more occasions than one! Look how people's tastes are constantly changing. Wood gives way to wax, no matter how brittle it

may be, or how liable to melt. Leather is preferred to both, no matter how dark the paint tints look upon it. Rags are cried up by some people as best of all for babies; and gutta percha suddenly supersedes everything else. And I might have broken my heart with vexation, as each of these new vagaries threatened to put my poor old three-cornered wooden nose out of joint, but that I had my Greek declensions and my Irish geography, and all sorts of knowledge, to support me, to say nothing of good downright bodily solidity; learning and strength, in fact. And if learning, strength, and being of use to other people, won't make one happy, I don't know what will, eh? And have I not had good reason to be satisfied, when here I am as you see, dears, at the end of a dozen common doll generations, as good an Aunt Sally as the best of them?

"Everything has an end, however; and so had my school-time. One summer our mistresses, now biggish girls, went from home, and when they came back, the governess told them they were too old to play with dolls any longer, even though they did learn fractions and Greek. Now, had this happened a few years sooner, when I was in the hey-day of impatience and self-will, I believe I should have felt as fierce as possible, called the governess names, and abused my young mistress for submitting. But as it was, I concluded there was some good reason for the decision, though I couldn't possibly find it out. And it was no small comfort to know that the blow did not fall on me only. My young lady

often came to take a peep at me in my wicker-cradle in the garret, and she would lift the coverlet as nicely as ever, and ask the poor old Dolly how she did, and say how sorry she was; nay, once or twice she brought up a friend to see me, and on one of these occasions she paid me the high compliment of saying she believed she should learn German twice as well, if she had me down-stairs to teach it to!

"What I felt when I heard these words, I can give you no notion of. I never before knew of *how much* use I had actually been, and the knowledge of it made me feel that I had nothing more left to wish for; so after she had covered me up and was gone away again, I fell into a sort of peaceful unconscious doze, which must have lasted many years.

"For the very next event I recollect, happened when my young mistress was a grown-up woman and married, and had a baby of her own.

"I was roused by a great fuss and disturbance in the house, and then by her coming up to the garret and calling out, 'Whatever you do, pray find the old doll. I must have my old doll for little Gretchen. There's the wicker-cradle, I declare, behind all those boxes! Fetch it out, and let me see the dear old creature's face again.'

"And when she did see me, she laughed heartily and took me out, and tried to put my stumpy old wig straight, but in vain. At which she laughed again, and said, 'This will never do; but I can have a new wig nailed on, which is more than can be said to a doll of modern days. It's a good hard

head this, that's one comfort, and as full of solid wood and hodge-podge learning as it can hold. Eh, Rosabella, do you remember your Greek and your Dante and fractions?'

"Why, my dears, when I heard that, I felt quite young again! It was as if the old jovial school days had come back, to hear that cheerful voice, and the fun sounding in my ears. And then the thought of the new wig—I confess I was not quite insensible to that! I knew the old one was worn almost bare, and half loose besides. Certainly a new wig is an event in life to those who wear them, and not to be talked of lightly. In fact, I spent much of my time now in wondering what colour it would be. For I must own to a weakness. I had a secret wish that it should be flaxen, having once in my life seen a flaxen-haired wax-doll, and thought it a sort of angel of beauty. So a flaxen-haired doll I must needs be myself; goose that I was for forgetting how little it would suit my hard wooden face and bright coarse colouring. When I was taken to the shop, however, the woman asked my mistress, 'Dark or flaxen, Ma'am?' and my heart was in my mouth, so to speak, for a moment. But the answer sobered me at once: 'Oh! dark, certainly. With those black eyes, flaxen curls would be perfectly ridiculous. Besides, I particularly wish the doll to be as it has always been.'

"This was enough; I submitted, and my vanity subsided. I never troubled my head about flaxen wigs again, and the new dark one was made and

nailed on before many days were over, to say nothing of fresh arms and legs, both of which were sadly needed. Luckily, however, I did not require re-painting, which I was heartily glad of, for having undergone the operation once, (just before my school days began,) I knew how disagreeable it was to be smeared all over with oily colours, and then when you think your troubles are over, have two or three coats of strong-smelling varnish laid on besides.

"And now behold Rosabella in her new wig laid in the wicker-cradle for little Gretchen to look at. But, oh dear! the wicker-cradle was by this time nearly in pieces, for it had been sadly battered about; and as for little Gretchen, she could not lift Rosabella, and did not like her staring black eyes half as well as those of the pretty little wax thing somebody had given her, with eyes that opened and shut by pulling a wire. Oh! those eyes that opened and shut, what a trial they have been to me more than once! No matter what a doll is made of or like, if she has only eyes that open and shut, children rave about her. I confess I never could see the great advantage of it; indeed, I persuaded myself it was a much greater merit to have one's eyes always open, but that was a stupid idea of mine, I suppose. Anyhow, my only resource was to take things easy and be contented. And so I did, though I was turned out of the wicker-cradle to make way for little Waxy, and had to accommodate myself with a box for a bed.

"But I didn't grumble. I only said to myself,

'My day of being of use is over. It's what we must all come to. But why *did* she buy me that new wig?' That was all. I really abused nobody.

"It makes me smile now, however, to think of my settling so coolly that my day was over. Why, my dears, I scarcely knew then what life was at all, for I had never been among boys. Talk of troublesome girls! a dozen of them can't do as much mischief in a day as a boy does in five minutes. *Five* minutes, do I say? I might say one! As years went on, little Gretchen had brothers and sisters till the house was full, and a new nursery had to be built; and by that time I had become a rather important fact, if not an established pet, in the nursery. But rather in a peculiar way. I was never No. 1 with anybody. Each child had a doll or a plaything preferred before me. But then I was everybody's No. 2, and therefore always of use, a universal necessity, a refuge in distress, when No. 1 pets were wearisome, or had come to grief.

"Let me not forget one exception, though. For nearly a year I was at one time the one undivided object of love to a little thing, the youngest daughter of the house, who, being herself the exact image of the flaxen doll of my vain ambition, was perhaps fond of me from the striking contrast we were to each other. Dear me! it touches my old heart now to think how we used to sleep together, both underneath the sheets, and with our heads on the same pillow; hers with the bright curls clustered close all over it like a doll's, and her rosy cheeks close to my

poor old faded face, (age was telling on my colours then,) and her arm across my neck as if to hold me safe. My dear mistress often came to see us as we lay so, and always smiled and said it pleased her very much, for we made such a pretty variety; my eyes always open, and the little girl's always shut in sleep. And this was the way I knew how we looked, and it used to please me to find I still pleased *her* as well as the child, for I never forgot old friends in new ones, remember!

"But with this exception, I was now always No. 2. But then No. 2's is a sort of favouritism which never dies, and I was soon satisfied that not a doll that ever came into the house could rival me in general favour; no, not even the Waxys with eyes that opened and shut! They might be very elegant, but wanted solidity, you see; and only let anything wanting solidity come near a boy, and you'll soon see how long it lasts. What do they care for *elegance*, the rough young rogues? And when once the elegant creatures' eyes are poked in, and their noses pinched off, and their necks have been melted white at the fire, the miserable remains of their bran-filled bodies are cared for by nobody.

"With me, on the contrary, it was quite different. In the first place, I was an historical character,—their mother's doll. 'Mother's old doll' had a value attached to her as such, to which no modern one could ever attain. Secondly, her solidity was a match even for the boys. They might cut off her wig, scratch her cheeks, break her legs, and poke holes

in her arms; but armless, legless, wigless, and scratched, she could always be repaired. New legs, new arms, new wigs, new paint, and the old stump came out as fresh as ever:—'Mother's old doll' in all her glory.

"And when once I found this out, it not only gave me a comfortable feeling of superiority over other dolls, but enabled me to bear any amount of rude treatment those *in*-elegant creatures, the boys of the family, chose to inflict.

"I wonder whether you would like to hear some of the strange things they did? I suspect you would, for every now and then they thought of something very droll, I must own. Only fancy, for instance, their taking it into their heads to burn that new wig I told you about, before it was a quarter worn out; and what for, do you suppose? Come, do try and guess! You can't; well, I must tell you then. Merely to smell how nasty it smelt. So like boys, wasn't it? A reason with no sense in it, and only funny because of its foolishness! One of the young rascals had singed his hair by an accident, and so discovered how disagreeable burnt hair was; and *therefore* (here comes the reason without sense) they decided 'what fun it would be' to fill the whole nursery with it, so as to stifle the nurse if she happened to come up, and perhaps, too, make her fancy something was on fire. But the difficulty was, where to get hold of any hair. I saw their faces as they sat over their candle puzzling, and then the gleam of delight when the bright idea struck them.

Mother's old doll's wig—such a lot of curls—hair enough and no mistake—and what a row the girls would make!

"'My poor mistress!' thought I as they seized me in my cradle, forced out the nails with an old knife, tore off the wig, and held it over the flame of the candle to burn.—'My poor mistress!—there goes seven-and-sixpence in smoke and smell.'

"Well, as soon as the wig was frizzled to a cinder, and the room full of the stench, off ran the young hopefuls to hide behind the door in the passage, and watch the result. And there I heard them exploding with laughter, as poor old nurse toddled upstairs, and hunted every hole and corner of the nursery to find the cause of such a terrible smell of burning.

"I meanwhile had been carefully replaced in bed, only with one of the baby's caps on my head; so no disturbance took place till next day, when poor dear unconscious Gretchen, looking into my cradle, called out in delight, 'O Nurse, how nice mother's old doll looks in the cap! Thank you so much for giving it her! She looks quite pretty!'

"You can just fancy the rest, I'm sure! It was baby's best cap with three frillings of Valenciennes lace all round it, and a blue rosette on one side. It might have been becoming,—I don't say it wasn't,—but nurse tore it indignantly off my poor bald head, as if all the fault had been mine.

"I suppose it's the same with everybody's memory, but certainly mine is clearer upon startling

events of life like this, than upon the little particulars of what happened every day. Indeed, of these I can give you no connected account, for there was always such a racket going on with such a large party of children, that I never knew what to expect from day to day, and nothing did happen two days alike. So you must be contented to hear the chief points of interest which remain impressed on my mind. Generally, however, I may say that Gretchen and her sister were very nice little girls, and though I was, as I said before, only pet No. 2 with them, I had nothing to complain of but the general wear and tear of life.

"Yet in justice to the boys, I must admit that I cannot say the same about the next sister—the one who came between the boys, like a slice of meat in a sandwich—for she was, at times, as great a Tomboy as either of them; but then it *was* only at times; now and then, that is, not always. At other times she could be as reasonable as anybody, quite motherly indeed, as she got a little sense into her head. But what a roguish face she had, grave as she looked to strangers; and the most comfortable fat cheeks that ever were seen. Her mamma used to kiss each at night, and call one the apple and the other the rose. My own were not more rosy in my young days, so I don't wonder people were pleased when they looked at her. But her mother didn't know half her odd ways. For instance, she never heard, till years afterwards, who it was that had cut the long hair off the front which I wore after the

wig was burnt, and so made it look like that of a shorn workhouse girl. But *I* knew! *I* could have told her of Tom-boy Miss taking me on her knee as quietly as possible, and snip, snip, snipping the front quite close, that she might stuff a hole in her brother's fur donkey with the hair. But, poor dear! she meant it out of good nature to him, and I consoled myself by thinking my very wig was of use to somebody. Certainly I was left a very wild-looking creature with the bristles that remained; so much so, that Gretchen took pity on me, and made me a muslin cap with a broadish frill round it to cover defects.

"You will wonder, perhaps, how I come to recollect and tell you this; but the fact is, that cap affair was a more important event in my life than you would suppose, for it brought about my third change of name. *Rosabella* had been long forgotten, and among these children I was chiefly known as 'Dolly,' or 'Mother's old Doll.' But no sooner had Gretchen put the cap on my head, than she jumped up, and ran shouting about the passages for her sisters; for was I not the exact image of the new baby's nurse who had just left the house, *Mrs. Blackmore*, to wit? and the notion spread like wild-fire; and even the boys agreed with their sisters for once, 'Blackmore to the life!' 'Blackmore all over!' 'Blackmore for ever!'

"And Blackmore, or, as it soon became, *Blacka-moor*, I was henceforth called, and considering my eyes and hair, a more inappropriate name might easily

have been found. Yes! and it was as Blackamoor I became the darling of that youngest child with the hair like a flaxen doll, the last of really loving mistresses I ever had. For, for the rest of my life after that, I degenerated into a sort of object of universal fun, everybody's favourite to do whatever they liked with, and to like, whatever they did.

"Three days a week, for instance, for a month together, one year, after the family had been to the sea, I was bathed in the mill-dam with a rope tied round my neck—an unnecessary precaution, by the way, for it was always my nature to swim.

"On another occasion, I had a series of shower-baths under the pump for a week, because the doctors had ordered it, to keep off an attack of brain fever. After which a spine complaint obliged me to be driven about in a little machine called a *drug*,* whenever the day was fine; the only inconsistency of the proceeding being, that the drivers ran so fast, I used to be thrown out half-a-dozen times in the course of the excursion. But this did them great good from the exercise, and me no harm, so I took it quietly, thinking to myself when the upsets came, 'What a mercy I'm not a Waxy with eyes that open and shut! *I* can afford to fall on my face.'

"One day at last, however, I was supposed to have been killed by one of these overthrows; and after being carried home on a flat piece of wood, as if to a hospital, my funeral was ordered, and my grave was dug; and the next day they popped

* Well known to children in north country villages.

me in, covered me up, and left me alone. Now when one is alone one can't help thinking, unless one happens to be asleep. So I began to think, 'Here's an end then; I wonder how far I've been useful in the world?' And then,—I can't tell where it came from, a horrid idea seized me that in this life among the boys, though I had been patient enough, I had been of no use at all; merely something to be kicked about and destroyed. But what a foolish fancy that was, I found out when I had thought a little longer. For of course I had set them a good example of patience, and of course if they had not had me to kick about and destroy, they would have kicked about and destroyed the furniture or something else, and perhaps of greater value. I reflected accordingly on my broken limbs and battered frame with great comfort, for thought I, 'I have saved my mistress's furniture, and that's something.'

"And so thinking, I determined on taking a long sleep and thorough good rest, which I did; for it was the boys who buried me, and I never awoke again till their holidays came round once more, when the very first thing they did was to dig me up, drag me to the lawn, make a circle of stones round me, and dance an Indian war-dance outside, in imitation of the Ojibbeways whom they had seen as they passed through London. After which the girls came to my rescue, first washed and scrubbed me in a tub, then dressed me in a night-gown, and put me to bed between warm blankets; and soon after they made their two younger brothers come in,

in hats and coats, the one as an Allopathic, the other as a Homœopathic physician, to prescribe for my case. Between these, of course, a tremendous tussle ensued, but it ended in my being ordered Dulcamara and Antimonial wine, alternately every three minutes, the effect of which combination was, that at the end of a quarter of an hour I was pronounced perfectly recovered; whereupon the doctors fell to squabbling again, as to which of them had cured me! I, meanwhile, was declared well enough to be able to take a dancing lesson, which, considering that in the course of so many carriage accidents and the burial, both my legs had come off, was rather peculiar. But they held me up, and I got through it pretty well; and it was then that my mistress, being asked by the children if they might send Blackamoor to the carpenter for a pair of new legs, said she was tired of getting her new legs, they were always being broken off to light fires with, or do something preposterous, so she would make me a pair of dark holland legs herself.

"It seemed a strange idea at first, and I confess I felt a little offended; but the legs turned out better than I expected. Nicely cut out for calves and feet, and well stuffed with closely packed cotton-wool, there was something about them quite novel and attractive. And I believe they would have lasted till now, but for that bathing fancy, which returned upon the children in hot weather, and made the unfortunate legs so soppy and nasty, that an impatient hand one day cut them entirely

off; after which the old stump was thrown into a rubbish closet and forgotten for at least six months, when cold wet winter weather made the young folks want occupation indoors, and the elder ones took it into their heads to clear out that very rubbish closet were I lay.

"Wonderful things, forgotten, and therefore as good as new, are sure to turn up for the younger olive-branches on all such occasions, and among others out came Blackamoor herself, *sans* arms, *sans* legs, *sans* everything almost, but the old solid stump covered with half an inch of dust.

"No sooner was I beheld than I was received with a general groan, which turned however somehow into a laugh very soon, and Gretchen suggested that the poor old thing should be treated with proper respect, and once more buried in the garden. But she advised that this time a stone should be placed over the grave, to mark the spot where I was laid.

"It is needless to describe the universal approbation with which the proposal was received and carried out; and when I knew that the third boy had spent a whole hour in carving my name 'Blackamoor' on the stone, with the date of the day of burial below, I thought to myself, 'This is really the end, I'm sure. Nobody will disturb me any more now. Well, I shall sleep quite happy, having been useful as long as I could, even up to the very, very last moment.' And so thinking, I composed myself to rest.

"But it didn't last long. At a very early hour

next morning I felt a tapping and scratching outside the grave, the stone was lifted up, and thwack came the edge of a spade across my face. Nobody but myself could have borne it, I believe, but the spade was not very sharp, and the hand that held it was not very heavy. It was the youngest boy of all—a mere child then in petticoats, but as bold in taking his own way as any among them.

"As soon, however, as he felt the spade hit my face, he laid it on the ground, and kneeling down, scraped the earth away with his fingers till he could see me quite plain. I wonder what he thought when our eyes met! I shall never know, but I have a suspicion from what I have since heard, that he half expected to see a skull, instead of my poor old head. Be that as it may, he looked very grave and inquiring, and it seems to me he must have wished to find out whether anything had happened to me in the night; a point about which he was evidently satisfied at once, for he lifted me out, laid me down while he replaced the earth and the stone, and then taking me in his arms, carried me to the barn, where he made a sort of nest for me in some old hay in a corner, put me in, covered me lightly up, and went away.

"It was an amazingly comfortable bed in cold weather, and I was quite satisfied, and rested as well as I had ever done in my life, if it had not been for the rats who disturbed me a little at first by running across my face; but I soon got used to them, for they did me no harm, not even tickled me as they went;

so I dozed off by degrees into one of my long rests, and I believe my last thought was, wondering what use rats were of, for that was always what I wanted to know about everybody:—what use are they of to other people? and here, where the rats and I were alone together, it was quite natural to inquire. But one can't find out everything even about that. It's a very interesting question nevertheless, and one that everybody ought to put to themselves about themselves.

"But was it not odd that I was woke up at last in the summer time that followed, by the arrival of a ratcatcher, who came to lay poison trains in the barn to kill those very rats? I mightn't have known much about it, but that the holidays had come round again, and the boys were helping the ratcatcher, and poking about in all directions to find traces of rats, so they came upon me in my nest; and, oh dear! what a shout there was when they found me! I really believe the ratcatcher himself, who with that horrible rat-skin cap on his head looked pretty well seasoned to anything, was startled when he heard the school-boy cry, 'Why, here's Blackamoor, I declare! How on earth did she come here? I thought we buried her last holidays? Who in the world dug her up? What fun!'

"Whereupon my former little friend came forward with a rather timid grin on his face, and announced that it was he who had done it; he had wished to know how I was, he said; besides, it was such cold weather then to be in the ground,

(wasn't that a kind thought of his?) He added honestly enough that after a day or two he had forgotten all about me. But now he would have taken me under his protection again, if the second boy had not interfered and suggested what a noble scare-crow I should make, and as the birds were taking all the peas and currants in the garden, what a capital thing it would be to set me up there to frighten them away.

"Here was a new line of life indeed, and I dare say many of you, my dears, may be inclined to think I was very hardly used in being made a scare-crow of; but that is because you are not old enough to know life as well as I do, and to appreciate the comfort of being of use to other people. The fact was, I had lived to be afraid of only one thing in the world, and that was, being of no use at all; (if such a thing is possible, but I have great doubts on the subject; one must always be of use either as a help or a warning, I suspect;) and my mind had been a little uneasy on the subject when I was left alone in the barn with the rats. Imagine to yourselves, therefore, the delight with which I heard that very proposal which seems to you so cruel and disgraceful. A thousand times better be a scare-crow and frighten birds from peas and currants, than lie idle and useless in the prettiest four-post bed that ever adorned a nursery! So I entered on my scare-crow duties, with a battered hat on my head, and long sticks for arms, with proud delight; and if nobody knew how happy I was, no matter. I knew it myself.

"And a scare-crow I remained till the peas were gathered and eaten, and autumn weather set in; when just as my old fever of wondering whether I was of any use was beginning to return, Gretchen and my last dear little mistress came strolling into the garden together; and Gretchen happening to look my way, stopped and exclaimed, 'Oh, that poor old doll! What a shame it is to see her swinging about in the wind and wet! Do let's take her into the house once more! She may come in of use yet on a wet day, and she certainly has nine lives, like a cat.'

"Didn't it seem now as if she had read my thoughts, and here was the answer? And the little one came and undid the fastenings, and threw the hat on the ground, and cuddled me in her arms, as she used to do in old times, and declared she would dress me up quite comfortably, and make me a crinoline, that I might be like other people.

"Really, girls are worth their weight in gold, for they always think of something pleasant and kind; and by what I heard remarked afterwards, my little friend's efforts were most successful, for I turned out a most respectable-looking matron under her management. The thick bishop sleeves she made in my dress looked as if there must be good stout arms underneath, though there were none at all, and the crinoline and plenty of petticoats entirely hid the want of legs, as did the close-fitting cap the absence of hair. To casual observers, therefore, I presented a thoroughly creditable appearance, and no one

could have suspected me of having played scarecrow so short a time before. Indeed, when I found how well they thought I had turned out, I had a half fright lest they should do by me what they were just then doing by several of their other old dolls and playthings, viz. give me away into some strange family. Of course I knew that if I had gone I should have been of use, but I had no fancy for so great a change, even to get out of the way of the holidays and the boys.

"And I don't think I should have altered my mind, even could I have anticipated what those creatures were to do to me when they next came home. For, as I said before, their mischief was really sometimes so comical, I could not help being amused by it.

"Now if you were to guess for half-a-century, I don't think you could guess what their next dodge was about Blackamoor.

"Well, it was a pouring wet day, and they had all been in the nursery doing carpenter's work with boxes of tools. One was making a bed for the dog to sleep in; another some shelves for fossils, and so on; when suddenly, 'I am so tired, I can't get on,' cries the third; 'I wish we could think of something fresh!' On which the rest left off work too, and there was a sort of general stare round the room, when it happened that the eyes of the third young gentleman met mine. One glance was enough, his face suddenly lighted up. 'I'll tell you what! It will be such awful fun! Let's have a trial, and

hang old Blackamoor! I've some pieces of wood here which will make a capital gibbet!'

"'All right!' answers the first boy as coolly as possible; 'but what shall she have done?'

"'Murdered her husband,' suggests boy No. 2, with a smile on his face. 'Let's smash one of the old dolls for the corpse of the late lamented Mr. Blackamoor. I'll be counsel for the prosecution.'

"'And I'll defend Mrs. Blackamoor,' interposes the fourth young hopeful.

"'And I shall be judge, and hang her in spite of anything you can say!' says the eldest.

"'That of course,' remarks boy No. 3, 'for I'm making the gibbet on purpose.'

"This was a joke indeed, and they carried it out with an ingenuity I could not but wonder at and admire. The girls were sent for at once, and gave up an already half-smashed wax-doll, to be quite smashed for Mr. Blackamoor's mangled remains; and this was laid on a fire-board, and covered with a sheet; and the trial was arranged, after a few suitable costumes, such as a barrister's wig and red jacket for the judge, &c., had been found in what was called the acting-box. I cannot half tell you how quizzical they all looked, for it was just like a play, where everybody is supposed to be somebody else than himself.

"Well! when they were all seated, the judge shouted for the prisoner to be placed at the bar, whereupon my little mistress, who acted as turnkey, brought me forward and set me on a chair. And

then the judge made a flourishing speech, in which he informed me I was charged with having deliberately thrown myself upon the late Mr. Blackamoor, with the criminal intention of smashing him to pieces with my weight, he being made of wax and I of wood; a statement which was received by all present with a groan of horror; after which the judge inquired if I was *Guilty*, or *Not Guilty?*

"When I heard this, I wondered for a minute whether I was expected to speak; but no such thing. My counsel now stepped forward, in a coat which trailed on the ground, and a hat which came nearly over his nose, and called out, '*Not Guilty, of course;*' for that Mr. Blackamoor was a horrible muff, and it was all his own fault.

"The company hissed at this, which obliged the judge to call 'Order! order!' and thump the table with a stick at the same time. Indeed I believe he stamped with his feet, besides. Then the counsel for the prosecution got up and made a few remarks, something to this effect: 'What could such an elegant man as Mr. Blackamoor have been thinking about, to marry such a coarse creature as I was?' a sentiment which was received with a general clapping of hands; on which he proceeded to say, 'That this was the worst case he had ever known. If I had offered to fight him, and then knocked him down and killed him, it wouldn't have been half so sneaking; but to take him out walking down a lane, and trip him up when he didn't expect it, and smash

him all to bits, was abominable. The witnesses would tell us all about it, if the judge liked.'

"Of course the judge liked; and two or three witnesses were called, one especially, a lady in a veil, who turned out to be Gretchen, who described herself as aunt to the late lamented Mr. Blackamoor, and as having seen myself and him out walking together on the fatal night in question. She described also that unpleasant words passed between us on that occasion, and that a scuffle ensued, in which Mr. Blackamoor fell on the ground, and I threw myself upon him, and dashed him in pieces at a blow.

"Here the judge inquired whether the mangled remains on the fire-board were indeed those of the late lamented Mr. Blackamoor or not? Whereupon the turnkey lifted up the sheet, and requested witness to look; which she did, but was so overpowered by the spectacle, that after uttering a smothered 'Yes!' she was supported to her seat in a supposed fainting fit, but I heard her splitting with laughter all the time.

"Then came another witness, who said he had been looking through a telescope for the comet that evening, but happening to incline it for a minute to the earth, had caught sight of the whole affair, just as the previous witness had described it, although at three miles distance.

"The judge shook his head on hearing this, and remarked that he considered the matter as quite

settled by the telescope evidence just given. Nevertheless, if I had any excuse to make, or any objection to being hanged immediately, 'That is,' added he with a grin, 'as soon as the gibbet is finished,' I was to say so as quickly as I could, for he expected the dinner bell to ring every minute.

"He paused for a moment; and up jumped my counsel again, but first whispered to the third boy, who had been hammering at the gibbet all the time of the trial, 'How soon shall you be ready? because I'll go on talking till you are.' To which the gibbet-maker replied, 'Oh, I shan't be a minute. There's only a nail or two to be put in. Cut away as fast as you like.'

"Whereupon my counsel hemmed, and began: 'Mr. Judge, and you, gentlemen of the jury, (here he turned to the second and third girls, who were doing jurymen in coats and hats) it's all nonsense about Mrs. Blackamoor murdering her husband. They used to quarrel, I know, but that was because Mr. Blackamoor was such a muff, he couldn't walk straight, and was always getting under his wife's feet, so of course she couldn't help tripping him up sometimes. And that day he had been to a friend's house and had got a little *fresher* than usual, so he stumbled about worse than ever, and upset her as well as himself. And when they tumbled down, it wasn't her fault that she smashed him to pieces, for how could she help wood being heavier than wax?'

"Again the judge shook his head. 'He had never

heard,' he declared, 'such a lame defence in all the course of his long experience. Mrs. Blackamoor ought to have rolled on one side when she found herself falling. He hoped the jury would not be such geese as to pay any attention to the prisoner's counsel, but bring in a verdict of 'Guilty,' and so end the affair. He shouldn't listen to any recommendations to mercy, so it was no good proposing them.'

"The answer of the jury to this lucid charge, was a shout of '*Very Guilty indeed!*' whereat all present in court clapped their hands once more, and the judge proceeded to inform me that I was to be hanged on the gibbet forthwith, and if it broke down with my weight, as he was half afraid it would, I was to be suspended from the nursery window, which would do just as well, and be firmer. Which sentence the turnkey, assisted by the lady in the veil and the two counsels, executed at once.

"And this seemed to be the natural end of the trial; but a few minutes after, as a couple of the children were chasing each other across the nursery, down came the gibbet, as the judge had foretold, and I lay sprawling on the floor. Whereupon the turnkey was summoned to complete the second part of his office, in which the judge himself condescended to assist. Doing so, however, in rather a hasty manner, the rope ran out further than he intended; I swerved with the sudden jerk, and in another instant felt myself dashing through the glass of the laundry window below. There was a dead silence

above, when the noise of the crash was heard, and I was drawn up again with all speed, and found the young party a good deal sobered by the accident. But the blame was all laid on 'those boys,' so it didn't much matter; for most parents lay their account to a few broken windows at Christmas and Midsummer, or at all events ought so to do!

"Nevertheless, this business led to my third burial, for my mistress herself suggested, on the painful occasion, that in her opinion nothing further would be done with the old doll, except that she should be flung about and do more mischief, so she advised her being once more returned to the grave, where if I could be of no further use, I should at all events do no harm.

"So buried I was once more, but I felt rather sad about it for a time. It pained me so that my old mistress should have been the person to put the finishing stroke to my long career of usefulness. I had no doubt she did for the best, but I own I thought her decision a little premature, and ventured to believe, that had I been allowed to remain above ground, I might still have been useful in many a piece of fun and good fellowship with those boys. Who could help liking their witty spirits after all?

"And you see, dears, I was not so far wrong. True, I fell off into a doze, and then into one of my deep slumbers, even while I was thinking all those things over. But when the young folks came the other day, and routed me up and out again, I declare I felt as fresh as ever. Why they laughed so,

I didn't understand certainly, nor what they meant when they said I should make a splendid '*Aunt Sally.*' But I was going to be *something* once more, that was as clear as that they were lifting me for the third time out of my grave, and I was as much pleased as they were, and quite contented to wait for the explanation.

"It might have been a long time though before I got it, but that the youngest boy knew as little what was the meaning of 'Aunt Sally' as I did; and having listened in vain for any chance information, he called Gretchen aside, and begged her to tell him who Aunt Sally was, and what they were going to do.

"So in that way I heard all about it, and submitted, I am sure you must all own, with a very good grace, to being scrubbed and painted up, and dressed and fixed on the stump of a tree for my new character. It certainly was a great consolation to hear, from my old mistress, that I had never before had so magnificent a complexion, as the pink one they now made me all over. Moreover, when I was finished, a great treat came, for the young folks invited all the boys and girls from the workhouse to tea, and I and a swing and a swarming-pole were fixed in a field, and were their chief amusements. The poor little things had been up from three o'clock that morning, I heard, blacking their shoes and getting ready. And when they did come they were so happy, that it seemed to me there was more fun than ever in the world! And when the children were gone, and one of our young

ladies remarked how useful I had been, thought I to myself, 'Yes, and in more ways than one! For are not *all of you* trying to be of use to other people, and mayn't I flatter myself that my example has had some . . . ?' but I won't be vain!

"Well! the new game is a rough one I know, as I said before, and I get some desperately hard blows now and then; but a loyal heart and a strong body are grand things, and I don't see why one shouldn't be of use as long as there's a scrap of one left. For my own part, I can look forward to the future with peace, for when the young folks are weary of Aunt Sally, there is a Christmas log to be found yet in the old worn-out stump."

THE HEAVY NEPHEW.

THE FLATLANDS' FUN GAZETTE.

AUNT JUDY TO NO. 7.

"MY DEAR NO. 7,

I HAD just been hours enough at this place to discover that it was one of the quietest, most uneventful villages in England, when your note arrived, imploring me to send you a "*real jolly, entertaining letter*," wherewith to amuse your comrogues next half-holiday. You may judge what my feelings were at so inopportune a request. At first I merely laughed, I must own; but then I thought of your disappointment in case I sent nothing, and resolved to try what I could do;—but what *could* I do? All my sympathies were being called out in another direction, and it was difficult under such circumstances to get an inspiration even for a ghost story, especially of the sort you always want, which is to frighten people dreadfully all along, and yet end well at last, with what old Mr. Weller calls a "raythersudden pull up."

I wonder whether you remember mother's old friend with whom I am staying? She once visited

some years younger than you, and rather slow; not very communicative perhaps. He may talk more to you though than to me perhaps; that will be natural enough."

She looked so grave while she made the announcement, it seemed quite deplorable; and I began to wonder, first, whether the nephew was deserving so good an aunt, and next, whether, if she could be brought to smile and talk herself, he might not turn over a new leaf as to *communicativeness*. You know there must always be two "parties" to anything like communion; and if one "party" shuts up, what can the other do, but shut up too?

However, at half-past ten o'clock the gentleman arrived, and certainly, at the first sight of him, I felt further removed from the atmosphere of fun than ever! Imagine the entrance of an unusually shy, heavy, large-faced boy of thirteen, who seemed to grudge shaking hands even with his aunt, much more with me, and who looked quite as grave as she did. "Poor No. 7!" was my agonized thought. "If I am to spend my time in drawing out this young gentleman, or even obliged to sit under his influence, what *is* to become of your ghost story?"

So little can we read the stars! This very young gentleman and I are sworn allies, and it is through him I am enabled to send you a bundle of such complete rubbish that I hope it will thoroughly answer your purpose; while it has served the very good end to me of bringing me better acquainted with a "fellow" whom, I am sure, you would

think one of the best you ever came across, if you knew him. I will tell you how it happened.

In the course of the afternoon, the heavy nephew (I shall still call him so) and I, found ourselves alone in the library together; but as I had already made several experiments of getting him to talk about his school, and what he did there, in vain, I made no further effort, but got out my writing-case with a view to sending you a chapter of groans and regrets.

So there we sat for a little time, he making a net for fruit-trees, which seems to be a standard piece of work he keeps here; and which lives, during his absence, in an old-fashioned window-seat locker in the library; while I, rather vexed altogether, was looking out of the window without beginning my letter; when, suddenly, the voice of my friend very unexpectedly interrupted my meditations.

"You don't find much to write about here, I should think."

It was deliberately and oddly spoken, so that I looked round half wondering if I should see a smile; but not a bit of it! The heavy nephew was working away at his net as gravely as possible; and all I could answer was (and I believe I did smile myself, his gravity was so absurd), "There does not seem to be a great deal going on here certainly: but country villages often are dull."

"But this is *so* dull it's quite a joke," remarked he; adding, in answer to a sort of giggle of assent I had made, "don't you think so?"

I *did* think so then, and said so, laughing; for it struck me that the remark was equally applicable to himself, though he seemed quite unconscious of the fact.

"I thought as much!" he exclaimed, and actually giggled too; and this very fact seemed to break the ice, and make him confidential, for he went on at once:—

"Aunt says I am to live here altogether, and manage the property some day,—when she is very old indeed, you know, and cannot. Shall I tell you what I intend to do then?"

"By all manner of means," replied I.

"Well! I shall set up an iron-foundry at one end of the village, and a paper-mill at the other, where the large pond is, and a weekly newspaper; we shall make our own paper for it, you see. That *will* be a change, won't it?"

I laughed once more, and he too, in a quiet way. Then I said, "You have lived in a manufacturing country, I suppose, at some time or other?"

He turned quite grave again at once; and, stooping over his net, told me his home used to be in such places, till quite lately—six years ago, that was to say. His father and mother had died then very suddenly, and very near each other, and he had come to his aunt, excepting, indeed, when he was at school, and that was the greater part of each year, of course . . . .

I saw the whole thing at once now, and felt to understand the case.

His grave, heavy face seemed explained, and also the difficulty of intercourse between himself and his aunt. Ah dear! how often one thinks what Tennyson has so beautifully expressed in the "Idylls" about people not comprehending each other in this world! Meantime, I had become quite interested. This desire of bringing back the recollections of his earliest childhood was quite touching; and there came a romance over the iron-foundry and paper-mill idea.

So I could not joke about them at all; and, happily, he soon resumed the conversation:—

"There's no fun like a newspaper; don't you think so? What I like best are the horrid murders and the 'Wants.'"

"But I hope you're not looking forward to putting horrid murders in your newspaper here?" cried I.

"Why, no, not exactly," answered he, looking up from his net. "One doesn't want them to happen, though if they do, it is pleasant to hear all about them. And I like the trials best, that was what I meant. Besides, I mean, my people here to be respectable as they are now, and the newspaper to be a sort of mixture of the *Times* and *Punch*,—true things told, and very funny ones added to make people laugh; so I can put in the drowning of kittens as a horrid murder, if I choose. There are so many funny things put gravely into newspapers as if they were very important. Don't you think so?"

Once more I agreed with him, and once more I

said so; but then a sudden thought struck me, and I got up from my chair near the window, and sat down by my friend.

"I am going to propose something," said I, "which I do think will amuse us both."

He gave me a half shy, half comic glance in return, and said, "Are you really? I don't see how you can."

"But listen first," I expostulated. "You know that your iron-foundry and paper-mill cannot be established just yet?"

He nodded assent.

"But I don't see why we shouldn't set up a newspaper at once."

"But there's nothing to write about here," exclaimed he. "You acknowledged that from the first."

"There's sadly too much to write about here," replied I (thinking of his aunt); "but it would be romance, not fun, I own."

He seemed to understand me at once, and looked down at that endless net.

"But *you*," added I, "said that the dulness here was quite a joke. The only thing against that is that the place is interesting. But let us go upon the principle of dulness being a joke. Let us invent a village with four or five educated residents, and the rest cottagers, and let us make it so dull that it is quite funny, and let us bring out its weekly newspaper."

"I don't understand you a bit," was the satis-

factory answer I received; but he admitted that "such a thing would be awful fun if one could do it, but the worst was, one couldn't. Nobody could make a newspaper out of downright dulness."

I begged that we might make the experiment, and the heavy nephew consented.

"I should call the place Flatlands," said I, "and the paper, 'The Flatlands' Gazette.'"

He nodded approbation. "Then I should make it establish an 'Association for the Advancement of Fun,' like the British Association, you know, for the Advancement of Science."

He nodded again in a fever of impatience.

"Then, the next thing is, the association must have a President, and I shall imagine you the man. What name should you like?"

"It doesn't matter what I like," cried he. "Invent something funny. Or—look here—they call me *Heavisides* at school. I am rather slow, you know; though I don't know that it much matters. Suppose you call me 'Henry Heavisides, Esq.,'—will that do?"

"Yes, yes," mused I; "Heavisides is a good idea. You must be brilliant enough in the newspaper, though, to make the name funny."

"And there must be a Vice-President too," exclaimed he, "to do the real work the Subs so often do. *You* must be Vice-President, please; but I can't think of a name . . . . Oh, yes, I can, though!" he added. "You shall be Miss Juliana

Allalive;" and the heavy nephew laughed outright, and threw his net on the floor.

We were now quite in the thick of the joke—planned a medical man, Dr. De Mize, who should hate homœopathy like poison; and a maiden lady who should practise it, besides spending half her time in worrying and being worried by her servants, Miss Dodge-the-maids by name: also a learned master of an ancient grammar-school, who should be deep in Greek and mathematics—if not shallow in wit—Mr. Olaus Magnus; and a retired half-pay militia captain, and his lady, who should do the elegant and *galant*. These seven characters, I protested, were enough to begin any newspaper upon; supernumeraries, to be merely alluded to and talked about, could be easily added: among whom, of course, must be the potent WE, the newspaper editor, who must never appear or be heard of except in the plural number.

The heavy nephew became absolutely excited as the plan developed, and, in a moment of enthusiasm, offered to "*do*" the Poet's corner, the whole of the "Wants," and other advertisements, and the horrid murders; if I would undertake what he called the political parts, the reports of the Fun Association meetings, leading articles, and literature.

His eyes absolutely glistened, and the heavy look had quite disappeared.

"One thing is very clear," said I; "you shall not appear as *Heavisides* at Flatlands! *Solid* is a

much more appropriate word. *Peter Solidsides, Esq.*,—what do you think?"

"I like it very much," he answered. "I have sometimes thought myself, that they said more about my heaviness than—than—"

"Than you deserved," I interrupted; "and you were right, Mr. Solidsides! Come, let us to work!"

And so the bargain was struck, and the enclosed waggon-load of nonsense is the result. You may not like it as well as a ghost-story, but it has been worth its weight in gold to me in the smiles it has brought to the face of the heavy nephew, and in the hope I entertain yet of making the aunt smile too. She has already been watching our confabulations with curiosity, and asked what we were so busy about, and this evening we are to get her to listen to our efforts. If one could once get them to smile together, and so get the doors of communication well open, they would in time be knit together by fellowship much closer still. But *pas à pas*. The change must come lightly and through easy means. The newspaper will show the aunt that the nephew has, at any rate, *something* more in him than she had found out, viz. a good deal of fun.

Your affectionate sister,

AUNT JUDY.

THE FLATLANDS' FUN GAZETTE.

"Ridete vel ridetote."—*Eton Latin Grammar.*

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS OF ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF FUN.

A LOCAL Association for the Advancement of Fun having been organized in this village during the past week, by our facetious young friend Peter Solidsides, Esq., it held its first meeting in the schoolroom of the schoolhouse this day, at twelve o'clock M., precisely: the three little boys who form the school having been flogged and sent home an hour sooner than usual for the accommodation of the members.

There were present in the reserved seats on behalf of the Association, Peter Solidsides, president, and Miss Juliana Allalive, vice-president, no other members having been as yet appointed.

The doors were thrown open, on this first occasion, to all well-dressed people, so that most of our leading families were in attendance in consequence. Among these we particularly noticed the learned head of our ancient grammar-school, Mr. Olaus Magnus, Captain and Mrs. McCannon, Dr. De Mize, Miss Dodge-the-maids, and other distinguished "parties."

The proceedings opened by a bow from our respected president to the vice-ditto at his side; a courtesy which that lady acknowledged by a graceful inclination of her head.

The president then rose from his chair, in his usual lively and impressive manner, and commenced his opening address. But he had only spoken the words "*Gentlemen and Ladies,*" when Miss Juliana Allalive twitched his sleeve rather sharply: a proceeding which took him so entirely by surprise that his accustomed equanimity deserted him, and he sat down again somewhat abruptly and heavily, stuffing his pocket-handkerchief into his mouth at the same time.

At this juncture Miss Allalive was heard to exclaim, "Hsh! hsh! you mustn't laugh yet, you hav'n't said anything funny," in an audible whisper; after which, she reminded her chief that they had both forgotten to appoint a *reporter*, an omission which must be rectified at once, otherwise how was the public to know what they said in their speeches?

The president replied, in suppressed tones, that was true; but he added with a giggle, perhaps it didn't matter much if *it didn't!*

To which Miss Allalive rejoined, that *everything* mattered, and this was not a proper time for making moral reflections.

The president protested that he never meant to make a moral reflection at all. However, they would appoint a reporter if she liked, only *she* must do it, as he doubted whether he could keep his countenance just then.

The vice-president then rose, and inquired in an audible voice whether the gallant Captain McCannon was present at the other end of the room, as, if he was, she would invite him to the honour of becoming reporter to the Fun Association.

And being answered in the affirmative, and that gentleman having stepped forward, she proceeded to remark that doubtless he had known something of despatch writing when engaged in military service; she concluded, therefore, that he was peculiarly qualified to discharge the duties of reporter in a satisfactory manner.

Captain McCannon, having performed a military salute in the direction of the reserved seats, walked up to them, and expressed his gratification at the honour conferred upon him, in a neat and entertaining speech. He was particularly glad, he said, to receive a compliment at the hand of a lady. He had always been at the command of the ladies. He considered it a part of military etiquette. Gallant and *galant* always went together. "The ladies for ever!" had been his invariable toast whenever he had had to propose one in those happier days of his life when the mess-room was open to him; and even now he kept up their memory by using the same words daily, before partaking of his *toast*-and-water beverage, his one *souvenir* of the past—besides, indeed, his half-pay. The club must pardon his emotion — these subjects never failed to call it forth. But he was asked to report other people's speeches, not to make his own; so he must stop. Well! he would only remark further, that Miss Allalive was right—(was it likely, indeed, that a lady's surmises should be wrong?) His own hands had more than once touched the Colonel's despatch-box. Yes! he would write the despatches of his laughable friends with the greatest delight; for although his sword was rusting in its scabbard, his pen was ever at the service of his country—and the ladies.

The gallant captain's address was received with considerable enthusiasm at the lower end of the room, and the three little schoolboys having luckily left their pens, ink, and paper behind them on the benches, the necessary materials were put into the captain's hands, and he retired to a desk in a corner to "commence operations," as he himself facetiously remarked.

The president now rose, amidst much cheering, to continue his long-deferred opening address to the society, consisting by this time of himself the

vice-president, and the reporter; and having had leisure during the interval to take this fact into consideration, he recommenced in more accurate terms than he had previously used—"Gentleman and lady"—whereupon the vice-president and the reporter smiled in so marked a manner that it was feared a fresh interruption would ensue. It did not, however, and the president resumed as follows:—"I believe I may say confidently that I have the unanimous consent of the society (cries of 'Yes! yes!' from the vice-president and the reporter) to the proposition I am about to lay down, and which is as clear as any of those in Euclid."

A shuffling of feet and a cough on the part of Mr. Olaus Magnus here checked the president's next sentence, but after his surprise was over, he proceeded.

"No offence to that great mathematician I have named, nor to the great one now present" (Mr. Olaus bowed); "but that laughable gentleman must permit me to say that he should have allowed me to come to the conclusion of my statement before he came to his conclusion upon it. If he can dispute the truth of *my* proposition, I will retire from office in his favour!"

Mr. Olaus Magnus here uttered a noise resembling a growl, and the president continued:—"What I was going to lay down is this. It has been unhesitatingly asserted that there is very little amusement astir in this village (murmurs at the end of the room); that it is a downright dull village (increased murmurs); that there is never any fun in the place (cries of 'Oh, oh!' mingled with a growl of 'Well, it's quite true')! While I, on the other hand," continued the president, raising his voice, "maintain that there's plenty of amusement, and lots of fun to be found here; only it is like the latent heat in cold iron, it wants bringing out!" (thunders of applause, with another growl of, 'Don't you wish you may succeed?') — He had been sorry to observe a dissentient voice in the crowd, but he would answer Yes! he *did* wish he might succeed, and he fully expected to do so; and the first step he should take towards that end would be to propose the election of the learned Mr. *Growler* — he begged pardon, *Olaus* Magnus —as senior member of the association, and inspector-general of schools — oh dear! he begged pardon again — he meant *sports*. He was sure the learned gentleman was cut out for the advancement of fun. Could any laughable friend then present suggest anything funnier in life than for a man to relax himself from his serious duties upon Greek particles and mathematical problems, and to sit writing at a desk, when he might be playing at cricket or croquet? He for his part—fresh from the schools he might say—thought it the very funniest thing he

knew, and had laughed at it hundreds of times. He trusted, therefore, that so well qualified an individual would not refuse to join the association.

Mr. Olaus Magnus came forward to the reserved seats, and said they were welcome to amuse themselves at his expense as much as they pleased, provided he had neither trouble to take nor money to pay. But as to inspecting sports, if they would take his advice, they would appoint his friend Miss Dodge-the-maids to that office instead. She was a lady whose close study of her servants' vagaries, eminently qualfied her for the detective inspection of any sport in which the human animal can be supposed to indulge. With the approbation of the club, he would request Miss Dodge-the-maids to come forward.

Miss Dodge-the-maids was now handed to the reserved seats by Mr. Olaus Magnus; but she refused to sit down, protesting that, under the circumstances in which she was placed at that moment, she did not see how she could possibly find time to stay the meeting through. The fact was, she had stepped in for a few minutes without letting her parlour-maid know the fact; who would—she felt sure—the moment her back was turned—(if she suspected she had left the house, that is)—be certain at once to—

Mr. Olaus Magnus here broke into a loud laugh, and said he hoped the association would now concur with him in perceiving that there were other things in the village funnier than his recreations among Greek particles and problems. On the other hand, he requested Miss Dodge-the-maids to be cautious how she wasted her valuable time in worrying over *would-be ifs*. There was nothing so harassing to the nerves; and he was confident she had ills enough *in esse* to contend with, without troubling herself with those *in posse*.

Miss Dodge-the-maids said she always did say Mr. Olaus Magnus was the funniest man she knew, for she could never understand above half what he said. But he did her no more than justice in supposing she was never out of trouble with *those maids;* and if he could give her a receipt for curing the evils that came in a possy she should be very much obliged, for she was quite sure misfortunes never came single, though they came to single women oftener than to anybody else, she really believed.

At this juncture the president was seized with a fit of hysterical laughter, which his usual expedient of stuffing a handkerchief into his mouth failed to suppress; and which so startled the vice-president that she requested Dr. De Mize to come forward, appointed him physician extraordinary to the association on her own responsibility, and requested him to prescribe for Mr. Solidsides.

Dr. De Mize complied at once, and was proceeding to feel the pulse, when Miss Dodge-the-maids rushed forward

with much animation, and a bottle of homœopathic globules, which she assured everybody were specific against all hysterical affections. She never was without them herself, as she was so liable to such attacks, from the annoyances she was subjected to day by day almost, she might say, by those maids! She had had one only the night before, in consequence of the housemaid having—

Dr. De Mize interposed with the sarcastic remark that there would be no lack of amusement at the meetings of the association, if amateur homœopathists were permitted to enlarge on the cures they performed. But he repudiated such an illegitimate source of diversion. It might be funny, but he didn't see why allopathy might not afford as much amusement in another way.

Mr. Olaus Magnus shouted with laughter, and exclaimed —Quite! quite! it was six of one and half-a-dozen of the other no doubt, but this was not the moment for the discussion of so delicate a point. The president's affection was a nervous one, and as an imaginary disease might well be cured by an imaginary dose, he voted that Miss Dodge-the-maids should be allowed to administer the globules.

Dr. De Mize considered the admission that they *were* an imaginary dose a sufficient concession. Miss Dodge-the-maids might safely empty the bottle-full down the patient's throat. As for homœopathy, his answer to it was always this—he should like to see it cure a cut finger,—that was all! Till then, he should stick to his plasters, and hoped his patients would stick to him in the same way!

Here the president, who, during the above laughable discussion, had shown symptoms of a gradual restoration to composure, broke down again, and burst out into renewed peals of laughter, which becoming infectious, as was evidenced in the case of Miss Juliana Allalive and others, it was thought desirable to adjourn the meeting to the following week, which was done accordingly.

LEADING ARTICLE.

A MORE complete success than the result of the first meeting of the Local Association for the Advancement of Fun cannot be imagined. Our president was bold enough to assert that this village was full of fun, if it could but be brought out, and his words have been verified already. An uproarious excitement prevails in all quarters, and the names of Peter Solidsides and Juliana Allalive are carried to the skies. The mine of our capabilities has been dug into, and a rich vein has come

to light. Henceforth we take our place as a fun-loving, fun-originating population.

We must confess, nevertheless, that our own situation as responsible editor of a public journal has, in the first blush of its novelty, a little overpowered us. Holding ourselves answerable, as we do, for the truth or falsehood of any statements which may appear in our columns, it was our intention to have sifted and digested all the facts and fancies that came before us, before offering them to the attention of the general readers. The mass, however, of contradictory assertions, probable and improbable rumours, suggestions and conjectures, which have poured in upon us from all sides, is such as to render all discriminating efforts vain.

Many of our communications, indeed, we shall not even condescend to notice; as, for instance, the scandalous insinuation which we are told is afloat, that some people are too thickheaded as well as *solidsided*, to know the difference between fun and folly. We throw back the vile imputation in the face of those with whom it originated, merely hinting that there may be some *other* people who are incapable of appreciating fun, not because they are too *thickheaded* to understand it, but because they are too *thinskinned* to bear it.

Other reports, for the correctness of which we are more or less inclined to vouch, will be found under the head "News raisonnée" in another part of our paper; while the following, which reached us at the very moment we were going to press, must be received by our news-thirsty readers with caution, although we see no reason ourselves for discrediting the facts.

Our informer states that, on her return home from the meeting, Miss Dodge-the-maids found herself carefully locked and bolted out of her own house by *those maids*, who persisted in shouting to her, through the front and back doors, that they were certain it wasn't herself, but a bai-

liff or a burglar instead. "Missis," they knew for a fact, was upstairs in her own room, for the door was shut and they durstn't go in, as she didn't like being interrupted, ever. When urged to come to the window to see her with their own eyes, they positively declined, on the ground that some horrid fellow might shoot at them with an air-gun if they did. Missis always told them so when she found them looking out of the windows.

It is further asserted that Miss Dodge-the-maids has taken refuge for the present with Mr. Olaus Magnus, who has permitted her presence in his house on one condition, namely, that when she wishes to talk about her own servants she shall go and sit with his; and *on dit*, in conclusion, that she has never been out of the kitchen yet!

NEWS RAISONNÉE.

WE understand that a deputation from the farming interest waited on the president this afternoon to request that one of their body might be allowed to sit at the Fun Association meetings to represent their interest. The president expressed his entire readiness to grant the request, as he believed the farming class quite as well qualified as any other to aid in the advancement of fun. All he insisted was that they should keep up their present custom of finding fault with the weather, and not allowing the crops to be satisfactory. This was quite enough to entitle them to become members of the association.

A petition was also sent in from the three little boys who had been flogged and sent home in the morning to make way for the meeting. They contended that the association had already made merry at their expense, and that they had thereby acquired a right of admission.

In proof, moreover, of their having active as well as passive claim on any society instituted for the advancement of fun, they begged to submit some

facetiæ of their own composition to the president and the vice, for their approbation.

The matter was not long undecided, for the *facetiæ* caused so much laughter to the authorities that the three little boys at once received tickets of admission to the next meeting, and the president obligingly honoured us by sending the *facetiæ* for insertion in our gazette. Accordingly they will be found in their proper place in these columns.

It is confidently affirmed that Dr. De Mize was so much gratified by his own remarks on homœopathy and plasters, that he has sent to Captain Reporter MacCannon for a copy of the report of his speech; with the view of forwarding the same to "the Phlebotomist," a well-known medical periodical, whose very name is a guarantee for its orthodox adherence to antiquated, not to say exploded, practice.

Our gallant and *galant* reporter has, by to-day's post, sent an order to a military outfitting establishment in the metropolis for a large despatch-box, which is to contain every convenience for use in sudden emergencies. It is rumoured also that Mrs. MacCannon is very urgent upon the captain to appear at the next meeting of the association in full militia regimentals. Her motive for such a suggestion being that the dignity of public officers is greatly enhanced by their costume.

Other reports of a most interesting description have reached us through the most unquestionable channels; but reasons of an imperative nature prevent our even hinting at the subject of them at present. We hope to be more explicit in our next number.

CORRESPONDENCE.

[The Editor does not hold himself responsible for the opinions of his correspondents.]

To the Editor of the Flatlands' Fun Gazette.

SIR,

ALLOW me to inform you that the hedges are beginning to look green.

I have the honour to remain,
Yr. obedt. Servant,
"A Constant Observer."

[A very good joke; but is the time of year well chosen? We fear that "A Constant Observer" is but a *closet* naturalist, and has not been

"abroad in the meadows"

for some weeks.—ED.]

To the Editor.

SIR,

I BEG through the medium of your valuable journal to protest against the inaccurate remarks which it has become the fashion to make with respect to the condition of the weather.

While suffering from chilliness this morning in an early walk, I met an individual to whom I not very inaptly remarked, "A cold morning, Sir." The individual in question, instead of assenting, as he was I may say in *duty* bound to do (for when is truth *not* a duty, Sir?) shouted, "Fineish for t' time o' year," and passed on.

I do not profess to understand half-measures or half-expressions, Mr. Editor, and consider that such phrases as the above ought to be put down by act of Parliament.

Y^r. obed^t. Servant,

A Briton.

P. S. I enclose my card.

[Which we have carefully burnt without reading. We are a Briton also ourselves; and as such patronize freedom of expression even about the weather.—ED.]

POET'S CORNER.

SONG I.

OH, beautiful moon,
Pray come out soon,
And light me to my dear,
Who lives near here.

SONG II.

Th' obliging moon shone bright,
Me to my love to light;
But when I got there—ah me,
My love had gone out to tea!

THE FINE ARTS.

THE Flatlands' Exhibition of modern painting is at length opened, and we proceed to give the public a little assistance towards forming its opinions of the pictures. *Ars longa, vita brevis est*, is as applicable to the Fine Arts as to medicine (or nearly so). But were we to say the same with reference to the art of *judging of Art*, we should not be far wrong. It is almost as hard to choose a good picture as to paint one.

We have no hesitation, however, in attracting attention to the merits of No. 2. *The Green, Flatlands*, by Miss Juliana All-alive.

This remarkable effort is in the style of Paul Potter. The lights are very sweetly managed, and the reflects of blue sky on a pig's tail in the right-hand corner of the picture are delicately handled. The composition of the piece is circu-

lar. It contains seven donkeys of various sizes, interspersed with about as many geese at intervals.

The one slight defect of this composition is a want of poetical feeling; but on the whole it is a work of great talent, and we may venture to prophecy that Miss Juliana Allalive will one day become unrivalled in her delineation of donkeys.

No. 6. *Sea Piece*, by Peter Solidsides, Esq. We rejoice in the combinations of genius. This spirited young man has many strings to his bow, and his talent for painting is already above mediocrity.

The composition of his sea piece is remarkable for its simplicity. It strictly carries out the motto attached to it in the catalogue, "Nil nisi pontus et aër."

The Sea-line, which is about half way up the picture, divides it into the two compartments of sea and sky. Both are enveloped in misty effect. The defect is clearly the want of a *contre-coup* to the horizontal line; a fault which the introduction of a water-spout would remedy at once. We recommend this hint to the artist's attention.

DREADFUL MURDER.

A CORONER'S inquest was held to-day on the bodies of three kittens discovered in the Flatlands' Pond yesterday evening. After a long and patient investigation of facts, the Coroner returned a verdict of wilful catslaughter against a party or parties unknown.

LOCAL INTELLIGENCE.

MRS. MACCANNON caused her carpets and rugs to be swept and beat this morning, and a surprising quantity of dust is said to have been lodged in them.

Mr. Solidsides' black dog got a thorn into his right foot last night, which was extracted by himself before he retired to rest.

As Miss Dodge-the-maids was curling her wig previous to retiring to rest a few evenings ago, her candle went out; an accident which reduced that lady to the unpleasant alternative of completing her toilette in the dark or leaving the room to obtain another light. We have not been able to hear to which of these plans she gave the preference.

The Stocks closed yesterday on a little boy who had been throwing pebbles against the windows of Mr. Olaus Magnus's house.

FASHIONABLE INTELLIGENCE.

WE have the pleasure of announcing to the *élite* of the Flatlands' public, that a *Substitution Fancy Dress Ball* will be held in the schoolroom of the schoolhouse, Flatlands, on the evening of this day-week:

under the patronage of the members of the Fun Association.

The novel idea to be carried out on this occasion is that no one is to appear in his own costume, but in that of a neighbour. The announcement has created great excitement and a good many jocose remarks. It is whispered among the best informed, that the juvenile Miss Allalive has persuaded Miss Dodge-the-maids to exchange with her, and has already tried on her front, known technically as a *jasy*.

OUR DUST HOLE.

WE have now the pleasure of presenting to our readers the promised "*Facetiæ*" of the three little boys. They consist of three riddles—an historical, a botanical, and a geographical one, and fully entitle the young authors to membership in the Fun Association.

1. Historical.

Why was the Prime Minister of England, in the year eighteen hundred and thirty-two, like a tabby cat? (P. T. O.)

Because he was *Grey*.

2. Botanical.

Which is the most officious of fruit trees? (P. T. O.)

The *Medlar*.

3. Geographical.

Which is the most inquisitive of rivers? (P. T. O.)

The *Wye*.

A wag has written to Mr. Olaus Magnus requesting a critical explanation of the trains of thought in two passages from modern authors.

"*The longer this medicine is taken, the less it will be wanted.*"

[Asserted of Norton's chamomile pills in the advertisement of their merits.]

"*Yours the same as ever, more so, if possible.*" Y. Z.

[Conclusion of a letter in the advertisement sheet of our contemporary the Times Newspaper.]

The wag asks Mr. Magnus *when* he may venture to leave off taking the chamomile pills, having once begun? And it is said that Mr. Magnus will publish an explanatory pamphlet in the course of a few days. One thing we know for certain—viz. that he was closeted with Dr. De Mize soon after the receipt of the letter, being anxious to consult him on the medical part of the subject. And Dr. De Mize gave it as his unqualified opinion that being "more the same as ever" meant *sticking to his plasters*, and abjuring homœopathic globules.

Communications to be addressed (Post paid) to the Editor of the Flatlands' Fun Gazette, Schoolhouse, Flatlands.

ADVERTISEMENTS.

WANTED. A few Thousand Pounds, by a great many People. Address, Anywhere you like.

WANTED. A HOBBY-HORSE, by persons who find their leisure hours dull.

N.B. He must not kick; but if he runs away with his rider now and then, so much the better.

Apply to Miss Juliana Allalive, Flatlands, for further information.

WANTED. By a young lady's friends, a gentleman in every respect WORTHY OF HER. To ensure which he must possess a superior understanding, and a comfortable house; high intellectual attainments, and a fine fortune; becoming humility and proper pride; retiring modesty and aristocratic ease.

He must combine the accomplishments of a professional with the manners of a nobleman; be no less rational than romantic; capable of the most ardent attachment, yet never led away by his feelings.

In a word, he must possess all the virtues and accomplishments possessed by the young lady, as well as those in which she is deficient. Religion and good principles taken for granted.

Apply as above.

MATRIMONY. An elderly gentleman, unencumbered by fortune, or personal advantages, is extremely desirous to unite himself to any lady possessing 3,000*l.* a-year, beauty, accomplishments, and good temper.

N.B. In case of necessity, the last three qualifications will be dispensed with.

N.B. 2nd. No joke is intended.

Address, Senex, Batchelor's Court, Flatlands.

A HORSE, lame of three legs, is to be sold at the stables of Messrs. Humbug, Sly & Co., for as much money as can be got for him.

N.B. In consequence of the unprincipled manner in which "parties" affecting to try horses have been known to ride off with them, the proprietor positively refuses, in the present instance, to allow the animal to be "trotted out."

A PRIZE has been offered by Miss Juliana Allalive, for the most correct answers to the following questions:—

1. How many sides has a round basket?

2. Which is the least useful of a donkey's legs?

ANY PERSON by applying at the Flatlands' tea-parties, may hear something to their disadvantage.

THE FOLLOWING NEW PATENTS have been granted:—

Patent India-rubber galoshes for sticking in the mud.

Patent steel-pens for scratching the paper.

Patent stoves for consuming their own heat.

Patent bottle-stoppers for letting out the scent.

SOME day to appear (under the superintendence of the medical profession) with illustrative notes; several new editions of "Killing no Murder." I. Hit-or-miss, Esq., M.D. M.R.C.S. &c., &c., &c., &c., &c., Editor.

N.B. Any patients desirous of contributing facts may rely upon their being carefully explained away.

JUST PUBLISHED.

NEW Sensation Novel. In 3 Vols. THE CRIMSON CRIMINAL; or, HORRORS BY WHOLESALE. By a Lady.

"We have laid these volumes down with a shudder, and we have shuddered every time we have thought of them since. Can praise go beyond this?"—*The Latter-day Review.*

"The Dumas must look to their laurels. *Sensationizing*, as an art, was never understood before the ladies took it in hand. It is scarcely too much to say of the work before us that any reader of sensibility, must remain breathless during the perusal of all three volumes."—*The Morning Hoax.*

AUNT JUDY'S POSTSCRIPT.

(A DAY LATER.)

My letter was forgotten by some accident yesterday, so I have the opportunity of telling you the happy result of our evening reading.

My lady was rather impatient at first—she owns she was; and really I could not be surprised at her feeling rather intolerant of such utter rubbish.

But when we came to the President's speech, I insisted that Mr. Solidsides should read it aloud himself, and handed him the paper. He refused in his most determined way, and shook his head imploringly at me. But I insisted, and he complied; and by degrees the whole aspect of affairs changed.

The heavy nephew has a deep, sweet voice, rather plaintive in natural tone, and sometimes becoming dismal, even to dreariness, in uninterested talk. But such a *degeneration* could not take place now, warmed up, as he was, by the "Fun Gazette-ship," and he gave us the rest of the speeches,—in short, the remainder of the paper,—in what the reporters would call a "masterly manner." It was quite curious to observe his aunt's dawning astonishment, as the changes of intonation in his voice showed his appreciation of the jokes in succession; and when

he was obliged to stop from laughing (which happened more than once), I noticed that *she* laughed too.

She was delighted with Miss Dodge-the-maids having to sit in the kitchen whenever she wanted to tell cook-stories; and when I told her the idea was Mr. Solidsides' own, her face quite beamed.

In fact, before we got to the end of the Gazette, she was almost prepared to add an article herself; for no sooner had the "Prize" advertisement been read, than she stopped her nephew quite quickly: "Mr. Solidsides, I beg to put in for it, 'A round basket has two sides, Sir,—an *in*-side and an *out*-side; will that do?'"

At which unexpected sally the heavy nephew jumped up, clapped his hands, and laughed till he almost cried, for he had written the question as mere nonsense, without reference to there being an answer at all.

Well! we finished at last; and just then some one having called the heavy nephew out, about a night-line for eels, my lady and I were left alone. No sooner was the door closed, than she said, "Juliana love, come and sit by me," and began rolling up her work, one of those large pieces of knitting, a shawl, or something of the sort, which people can go on with in twilight almost. It was to her what the fruit-tree net was to her nephew, a sort of standard labour which never seemed to come to an end. She had laid it down several times during the reading of the Gazette, but now

appeared to be putting it by altogether, and I wondered what was going to be said or done.

I obeyed her at once, however, seating myself in a little Derby chair near her sofa, saying, as I did so, that I hoped we had not tired her with our nonsense?

She smiled. "I don't care about its being nonsense," she said. "It touches on human interests and human weaknesses, shows observation of life and manners, tells several home-truths, and gives several moral hints. We live our earthly life by little things, more or less, all of us, and to guide them as little foolishly as possible is an art worth learning, and your jokes help to teach it. Ridicule is a good weapon to fight small follies with, though a very unsatisfactory one against sin. I like your Gazette well for itself; but still more, because through it I have learnt to see my nephew so differently to what I have been used to do. But that has been my fault, not his."

"He is very reserved, naturally," I observed, scarcely knowing how to reply.

"No great fault in youth," she went on, "and under circumstances so unfavourable to heart-openness, too! No, Juliana; it has been upon my mind—my heart, indeed, for some time, that I have been to blame for our not understanding each other better. But even when most suspecting this, I have not known how to shake aside the evil. It is so difficult to alter a manner one has fallen into; to take up a new position required such an effort,

and I shrank from making it. How childish! As worthy a place in your 'Fun Gazette' as the follies of Miss Dodge-the-maids herself. It was for me to have helped him over the stile. He was not likely to be demonstrative first."

"You *have* helped him in all essentials," I said, hastily, for I felt very sorry for her.

"In what the world calls essentials, yes," she replied; "but that was comparatively easy, for it was a matter of duty. Duties are sadly easy of fulfilment to those who have no personal wishes left. It was when all hope of earthly happiness had been swept away from my own path, that I made the resolution to live thenceforth solely to be useful to others. But with this resolution there was, I fear, involuntarily mixed up a determination that there never could—never should almost—arise any pleasure to myself. I would help everybody where I could; what more was demanded of any one? I translated the gospel-love of our neighbour into that Christian charity which ought to be world-wide, and know neither relationships nor friendships as a matter of feeling; forgetting that prayer which justifies the craving for ties of sympathy by its very opening, 'Our *Father*, which art in heaven.'"

My lady had joined her hands as she uttered the words, and now sat for a few seconds silent. Then she resumed:—

"This ought I to have done and not have left the other undone. We cannot shut ourselves up from the affections and sympathies of others, with complete impu-

nity. God meant otherwise in giving them, and the vain effort brings on a hardness—a harshness—a coldness—what shall I call it? but no matter about the name; a feeling I hope you will never know, of being cut off from a tree to which all the rest of the world belongs. People talk, I believe, of me, as sacrificing my whole life to others. How little a man knows of his neighbour! My offerings have been more like Cain's than Abel's, I fear. What was easy to give up I have given; what I prized I have withheld. Not to mention the poor, the assisting of whom is always the easiest task of all; it was nothing to me to take this orphan child, my nephew, to my home, make him my heir, and so repair, as far as I could, in what you call 'essentials,' the loss of his parents. But to unlock the doors of my desolate heart to a comparative stranger and mere lad; to find out what *he* felt, and let him know enough of what *I* felt, to understand me, and make allowances . . . that was a task indeed, and one I dared not undertake; a sacrifice I was not capable of."

"It will be all right now," I ventured to say, as she paused.

"By degrees, yes!" she replied. "Your fun and appreciation of him have brought to a crisis what has long been fretting in my mind; more and more as suspicion increased upon me that there was much more in his character than I originally thought. One is very ingenious in self-defence; and my chief plea in favour of my coldness has

been that he was dull. You have thrown that overboard, Juliana, and I stand convicted even to myself. Poor boy! I have much to make amends for!"

"But he, much to be grateful for!" I exclaimed; and I went on to beg her not to mislead him by disputing it. Mental struggles are not easily comprehended by boys, I argued; and it would be cruel to both of them to go over all these phases of feeling again. He would be early enough made happy by sympathy, if she made him happy now.

And I really think so; for after all he has only suffered negatively; and negations of happiness are often admirable training opportunities. Perhaps he might not have been the original, self-supporting lad he is, if he could, all his life long, have babbled out every little trouble, and found sympathy at every turn.

She was most interested at hearing this, and all I had to say, and we talked till he came in from his night-lines, and then had a jolly Fun Gazette chat, which would have astonished the solemn old walls of the room, if they could have been aware of the change. And the prettiest conclusion followed—for my lady *can* do things like nobody else. When ten o'clock came, she walked up to him and laid her hand on his shoulder, saying it was time he began to keep the old lady now. "Juliana will tell you," she went on, "how much I like your reading. The servants will come to prayers directly—I should like you to read the Psalms for us, instead of me."

The dreary face with which he looked up at her,

in answer to this appeal, would have turned her away in disgust at any other moment, but she smiled now and said very kindly, "Mr. Solidsides, your good gifts must not be thrown away!"

On which, a flush of colour stole over Mr. Solidsides' face, and he smiled too, and took the book from her hand.

We won't attribute more than it deserves to the Flatlands' Gazette; but you must own that I have, on the whole, sent you a romance for your own pleasure, and fun for your comrogues at the same time. Keep the romance to yourself, of course, for the present, though it is true that, just before I was in bed, my lady came to my room, and herself suggested that, if I was making up, as she concluded was likely, one of my "Aunt Judy" letters to "the others," about the Fun Gazette, I should on no account omit a true and correct account of herself and her nephew.

"The truth would work up well in this case," she added, "and I wish you to use it. Besides that I think lessons are often best taught by actual examples, you have one at home who has failed again and again to persuade me by serious arguments, and will rejoice to find that her daughter has been more successful by a joke."

Of course, I took *this* joke kindly as it was meant, for the truth is, she has been secretly undergoing conversion for a year and more. But I accepted the permission she gave as regarded herself and what she had told me, and got up at a wildly

early hour this morning to add the account to my former letter. Her parting words last night were, "I know you will try to make even my shortcomings picturesque—but, Juliana love, pray speak the truth!" With which injunction she kissed me and went away.

And so, as it is a new day, I will bid you goodbye anew, and subscribe myself once more

Your loving

AUNT JUDY.

GRANDMAMMA'S THROAT.

"Renew my will from day to day;
Blend it with Thine, and take away
All that now makes it hard to say,
Thy will be done!"

Hymn, by CHARLOTTE ELLIOTT.

DON'T you think, Mamma, that we are rather *particularly* unlucky about these kind of things?

The inquirer was No. 6, and she was seated at the corner of the nursery table near the fire, with three or four folds of flannel wrapped round her chin and head.

Poor No. 6 had the mumps; not badly, so that she had to lie in bed, but quite badly enough to prevent her going to a dance at a friend's house, to which the four little ones had been invited, a fortnight at least before.

"*Particularly* unlucky? I hardly know about that," answered mamma, "four of you were asked, No. 6, and three are able to go; and then it is not a serious illness which is keeping you away, only a very uncomfortable slight one. Do you see? It would be so easy to be much more *unlucky*, as you

would be so

GRANDMAMMA'S WEDDING DAY.

call it, though, of course, unlucky is not the right word.

"I see," said No. 6; and she really did see. So she turned to the book before her, and tried to think as little as possible of how hot the flannels were, and how tired she was of not being able to open her mouth comfortably, &c., &c., &c.: for the various little discomforts of feverishness cannot be put into words.

Mamma meanwhile had left the room; and presently there was a sound of the fly driving away with the other three, who had gone off in tremendous spirits, although they were really very sorry for No. 6.

Indeed No. 7 had very seriously asked permission to stay at home and amuse her, instead of going himself.

But this, mamma would not hear of, for several very good reasons. Moreover, she believed that No. 6 was both old enough and wise enough to bear the disappointment without making a fuss, or spoiling other people's pleasure.

And she was right. No. 6 took the little trial quite quietly. Nay, when No. 7 was bidding her good-bye, and said how sorry he was, she looked up cheerfully and answered, "Oh, never mind; it really doesn't much matter; I don't care very much; give my love to them all; and mind you dance with the little ——s."

Now the little ——s were particular friends of No. 6, and missing the fun and pleasure of seeing

And then, both having warmly agreed that fretting about small checks and discomforts must always be wrong, the conversation turned off to the scrap-book, which No. 6 managed so well, that by-and-bye mamma went away after her own business, telling the little left-behind, with a smile, that her old nurse had been sent for to tea, and would not only amuse her, but perhaps help in the overcasting the leaves of her book.

And so it came about that the day of disappointment was as quietly happy a one as the rather tiresomely hot flannels allowed. But after all that was a trifle, and half the folds were taken off when she went to bed.

And No. 6 was soon well and had enjoyed immensely hearing of the "awful" fun which the others declared they had had at the ball. It was so nice, too, to find that the little ——s had almost cried when they found she was not coming; and next day one of them sent her the most charming note of regret that ever was written on pink note-paper. It began, "*Dearest* No. 6;" and there were two dashes at least under the *Dearest*, and a scratch which No. 3 insisted was another dash too, but No. 6 stoutly denied the fact; though who was right was really very doubtful. Anyhow the letter overflowed with the little writer's love, and disappointment at not seeing her friend. And it was all perfectly true; for though she had danced the greater part of the evening, No. 7 bore firm witness that she very often came to him to ask questions about No. 6, and say

GRANDMAMMA'S WEDDING DAY.

it was quite confusing; and as to the number of real staircases and staircases of two or three steps, nobody could believe it who has not seen them.

A very nice young girl showed me about, who was quite amused at my being surprised, and I suspect took me along some of the passages merely for the fun of seeing my astonishment. At last she led me to one, at the end of which was a large carved mahogany door. "There," said she, "I have just brought you here to look, but you must not go along that passage at all. *Grandmamma* lives there, and nobody is allowed to disturb her. The children never play here, for fear of making a noise. But never mind; grandmamma is sure to send for you all some time this evening."

So saying she turned away, and I asked who grandmamma was. Well, of course grandmamma was grandmamma, and very old—her father's mother; and the castle really belonged to her for her life; but when she first became a widow she sent for her son and daughter-in-law, and told them they might come and live there altogether, on condition that one part of the house should be kept entirely for her, and nobody be allowed to interfere with it. "So you see we have always lived here," pursued my companion, "and grandmamma has all the rooms along that passage, and some more below, completely to herself, and when she wants to see us she either sends for us or comes out. I wonder whether you would like to see the pictures of her —there are ever so many, downstairs; some with

powder and some with curls; one as a shepherdess, another as Minerva, and one when she was a very little girl, as an angel in the clouds, with a couple of such droll little wings! Grandmamma has often told us about that picture. She says people thought she was so delicate, they used to doubt whether she would ever grow up, so they painted her as an angel on purpose."

I could not help smiling as she ran on, but said I should like to see the pictures very much; so she took me into the rooms where they were hung, and I soon found that her account was perfectly correct. There was poor "grandmamma" in at least half-a-dozen different fashions and costumes, and there she was, too, with a pale thoughtful face, and very large eyes, looking up, a little angel in the clouds. I stood before this picture for some time, and then asked my young companion how old grandmamma was? To which question she answered, "Eighty-nine or ninety—she herself is not quite sure which." It seemed so odd after hearing this, to look at the little angel in the picture and think *it* had lived to be such a very old woman; and I felt and expressed a hope that I should see grandmamma before I went away. "Oh, yes," said my friend: "when these large parties come to spend the day here, she generally has the young ones into her rooms to show them her large blue dragon-china jars, with a carved dragon for the knob of the covers. She has all manner of curious things—japanned boxes and fans, and old watches, and I

can't tell you what; and she likes to show them to children, and tell long stories about them."

We should have gone on talking for an hour but that it was dressing time; there being an early dinner on the children's account; and after dinner we rambled about the gardens and park, and the children played at games till sunset, all but one little girl, whose mamma sent for her to come in before the others, because she was very apt to catch cold.

It was all quite right, but I felt very sorry for her when I saw her carried away, for she was just then *the bull in the ring*, with a circle of nearly twenty other girls dancing round her; and they were all enjoying themselves immensely.

So when I saw my friend of the morning break out of the ring and take hold of the little one's hand to go home with her, that she might not feel herself sent off with the servant only; I ran after them, quite prepared to offer to tell her a story or help to play with her in the house. But though they were very glad to have me, any offer of my services was needless. As I came up to them my friend was in high talk with the child, assuring her that she had got an immense treat for her indoors, for she would take her to grandmamma and ask grandmamma to show her the blue jars with the dragons, and the fans and japanned boxes, and the most wonderful things she ever saw in her life. The poor little thing looked up quite delighted, though the one or two large tears which had reached nearly to the bottom of her cheek, showed how sad

she had felt just before; and so we three proceeded to the house, and then upstairs, and then to the mysterious passage.

"But I thought you told me," whispered I, "that grandmamma was never to be disturbed, and that nobody went to her, unless she sent for them?"

"Yes, that's the rule," answered my friend softly in reply; "but there is always an exception to it if anybody is in distress. Then one may go to grandmamma and knock and tell her about it at any hour in the day. I am sure she will let the little girl in."

And so indeed she did. I watched them to the end of the passage and heard the knock against the large mahogany door, the inquiry who was there, the answer—"Somebody in distress," and then the "Come in," at once. And of course I knew no more till my friend returned, and told me she had left the little child sitting on a stool at grandmamma's feet, with her lap full of curiosities; and that grandmamma had bid her tell her maid to fetch chocolate and biscuits for two. "All is right, you see," pursued the grandchild, "and they will both be as happy as queens."

My friend was as happy as a queen at any rate; and we spent a very pleasant evening after that, talking of what we liked best to do now, and what we should like best to do when we were older, until a servant came to announce to all the assembled party that grandmamma would be happy to see the children and a few of the young ladies upstairs.

My friend immediately asked leave to take me,

and a suitable party having been made up, we proceeded once more to the passage, and finally passed through the mahogany door into grandmamma's room.

Now, to tell you the truth, I cannot say I thought her *very* like any of her pictures. She certainly was as unlike the one with the head turned sideways, to show the large love-lock which hung down over the neck, as possible. Nor was she a bit like the one with powder—no, nor the one with curls either. In fact, the only one there was even a look of was, strange to say, that of the little pale-faced angel in the clouds; but this I only found out when I saw her lift up her eyes and smile.

Poor grandmamma! She was sitting in a large arm-chair, with the little girl still on the stool at her feet, only now leaning her head back against the comfortable grandmotherly knees, which had evidently arranged themselves into a sort of chair for her especial convenience.

Grandmamma began of course by asking us how we were, and shaking hands; and she even shook hands with me. But very soon she asked us to sit in front of her in a circle, as the little girl had told her that some of them had been wishing to hear a story that evening, so she was going to tell them something she had been thinking of.

We obeyed at once, for the pretty little green and gold japan chairs, which seemed made on purpose, were very soon arranged, and then grandmamma began as follows, as nearly as I can tell you; and her story I shall call,—

GRANDMAMMA'S THROAT.

"My dears, I almost wonder why you want me to tell you a story, when you have such a number of nice books to read—very different books, I can assure you, from those we used to have when *I* was a little girl! Dear me! if I could find all the lost torn pages of my old books, how it would amuse you to see what used to be called '*beautiful cuts*' in those days. Those in 'Cobwebs to catch Flies' I particularly remember, and some terrible pictures in Mrs. Trimmer's Roman History; Curtius jumping into the gulf, Mutius Scævola putting his hand into the fire, &c., all the faces drawn with such hard coarse lines, you would be ashamed to do them no better yourselves.

"This has nothing to do with my story, however, but you must remember I am an old woman, and so must be allowed to ramble a bit; besides which, it is as well you should know what great advantages you have in the books and pictures of the present day. Well! I am rather afraid that because I am so old and wear a curious cap, you expect me to have my head as full of fairy tales as poor dear old Mother Bunch's was. But this is far from being the case. Indeed I must begin by telling you that in all my long life I never saw either a fairy, or a ghost, or a giant, or an ogre, nor even Bogy, whom

one so often hears about. It is only fair to let you know this, lest you should be expecting something more entertaining than is really coming.

"Well! I look at you all with your eyes fixed upon me—eyes of every sort of family tint; and I wonder to myself whether any of you have got *throats!*

"Now, this surprises you very much, I dare say, for you *know* that you have throats, and can put your hands upon them. But the throat which I am asking about is a different affair, as you shall hear.

"When I was a very little girl there came to our house an old lady, an aunt of my mother's, who wore a long, heavy, gold chain round her neck, with a gold-mounted eye-glass hanging from it.

"I remember this so well, because, when my mother first sent for me to be shown to her, she put up this eye-glass to her eye as soon as ever she saw me, and kept it there so long, while she was looking me over from top to toe, and wondering whom I was like, that I felt quite silly, and *therefore* (I was but a child, remember) took quite a dislike to her; so that I was by no means pleased, when she dropped the eye-glass at last, drew me to her, and kissed me.

"So I got away as soon as I could, and hid behind the sofa; but in the course of the evening the old lady insisted on my coming back, and standing in front of her, and answering a number of questions which she put to me, looking at me still from time

to time through the glass; after which she produced a beautiful puzzle which she had brought me, about the History of England, formed on a set of verses beginning,—

"'William the Norman conquered England's state;
In his own forest, Rufus meets his fate;'

all which, from beginning to end, she insisted on my reading aloud, from the paper that belonged to the puzzle.

"Now I was a very good reader of my age, and once fairly started, I went satisfactorily through the task, and then, having safely arrived at the end, quite expected to hear her say, 'That's a good girl, now take away your puzzle, and play with it.' Instead of which she turned suddenly from me to my mother, dropping her eye-glass as she did so, and asked, 'Maria, hasn't that child got a throat? I really believe she has.'

"'Not that I know of,' answered my mother, evidently a little startled by the inquiry; and then the old lady rejoined, 'Well! only look in. I'm afraid you will find it is so.'

"And, sure enough, they both proceeded to look in, one after the other, talking to each other hard words which I could not understand; and no wonder; it was so very uncomfortable to have to open one's mouth very wide, while one person held a candle quite close to it, and another peeped in!

"I never shall forget what I felt when I saw the old lady coming to peep through her gold eye-glass.

In fact I shut my eyes in horror of her, and resigned myself to my fate, trembling as to what would happen next.

"Nothing happened however, and after awhile I felt the glare go away from my face, and heard my mother say, 'That will do, dear. You may shut your mouth now.'

"Which I did; and opened my eyes just as the old lady had turned to my mother, and was saying, 'I was certain it was so from the tone of her voice. It's a troublesome thing, but people outgrow it. Only you must be very careful. My Fanny had it when she was little.'

"Nobody spoke any more to me, so I slipped away to my puzzle, after wondering for a minute or two what it was to *have a throat*, and whether *Fanny* had minded it much.

"But by-and-bye I was called to bid good-night, and then the old lady took up her glass to give me a last look, and said as she did so, 'Of all things, Maria, you must send her to bed early; she cannot have too much sleep, *with that throat*.'

"*With that throat!* The words followed me upstairs that night, but I little knew then how they were to follow me through many a long year of my life.

"Ah, my dears, what a comfort it is that God does not let us know beforehand what is to happen to us. You can hardly believe this, I dare say. You fancy it would be nice and entertaining to know everything that was to be. Instead of which

it would be a great misfortune; how great only those know who are old enough to look back over the trials of a lifetime. I am one of those, and I know that it would have broken my heart to have seen beforehand all the sufferings and sorrows that I had to go through. And yet each one as it came near, was softened in some way or other, and strength came with it to bear it.

"But I do not want to preach a sermon, so I will say no more about this. I tell it you as we old folks tell everything to young ones; that is, knowing they cannot quite believe us till they have found it out for themselves.

"Well! this throat was to be in a small way the trouble of my life for nearly twenty years; but in happy ignorance of this I went to bed that night, and slept too soundly even to dream of the old lady's gold eye-glass. And after a day or two she went away; and I should probably have forgotten her altogether, had it not been for *that throat*, which became henceforth a subject of family conversation, and so kept the memory of her eye-glass and her discovery alive in my mind.

"I dare say you wonder what 'that throat' was, but never mind about that. All I ever knew of it myself in my childhood was, that it was the cause of half my pleasures being either denied me, or cut short. Oh dear, it pains me even yet to recollect how sad I felt it, when visitors were with us, or any sort of amusement more than usual was going on, to be the one alone of the young folks who either could

not be there at all, or had to be carried away before it was half over. Such deprivations were very trying, although it was a comfort to me, after I grew up, to remember that, sorry as I used to be for myself, I was never vexed that others should be more fortunate. But you can just imagine how it was. I am sure you can, because when you have been *accidentally* not quite well or strong yourselves, you must have had either to remain upstairs when others were enjoying themselves, or to be taken away from your pleasure sooner than the rest, and will recollect what you felt. Well then, think of this happening to me on almost *all* such occasions! For on all occasions my mother bore in mind the old lady's saying, 'Of all things, Maria, you must send her to bed early; she cannot have too much sleep *with that throat.*' So she never gave way, not even when good-natured strangers used to express surprise, and ask for me to stay: 'Oh surely she is not going so soon? Pray, Mamma, pray, let her stay a little longer. Why, it's only so-and-so o'clock; she cannot be tired yet.'

"No, nor was she tired, my dears, nor did she feel her throat at all. But still she was always doomed to hear the sober voice of mamma—ah! how well I knew it—make answer, 'No, I know it is not late, but this little girl is always obliged to go to bed early—because of her throat.'

"And here sometimes would follow inquiries from the stranger, and answers from mamma, about the throat and the sleep, &c., and murmurs of

'Poor little thing!' And sometimes the 'poor little thing' would water her pillow with a few tears before she could fall asleep.

"I think this going to bed when other children of my age were able to sit up and enjoy themselves was one of the earliest of my throat troubles. But about that time I used to suffer from another thing, and that was the personal remarks of the people who came to the house. There are few things more disagreeable to children than to have personal remarks made upon them, and it is a very silly thing of people to do it. But I had always been rather pale and thin, and I suppose this became more striking the taller I grew, so I was liable to hear myself very unpleasantly talked about to my poor mother, who used to sit on thorns all the time, as she has told me since.

"This was the sort of thing:—'How delicate your little girl looks, dear Mrs. ——! Is she poorly?' Now, whereas formerly my mother would have answered, 'Oh no,' and so stopped further remark; after the old lady found out my throat, she had no heart to say 'Oh no,' any more, but used to reply, 'No, not poorly exactly, only she is subject to a throat; not that it hurts her at all, but I believe it always makes children look pale.'

"On which the visitor would exclaim, 'Oh, indeed; poor little thing, she does look very ill certainly.' And then, how angry I used to feel! What had *they* to do, I used to think to myself, with my throat, or how I looked?

"Now, though I do think it very foolish of people to tell a mother how delicate her child looks —since, if such be the case, nobody knows it better, or is more sorry about it than herself—still I have often thought since that I might have spared myself many childish troubles if I had been less irritable about little vexations of this kind. After all, what the people said was true, and it did not make me poorly that people should think and say I looked so. But I used to feel so vexed, that sometimes I would cry and refuse to go downstairs altogether, the only reason I could give for which was, that I hated to hear people teaze about *that throat.*

"By degrees, however, as I got a little older, and when my mother had said to me all the wise things I have just been saying to you on the subject, I left off minding people's remarks, and at last wondered they had ever troubled me at all.

"For in spite of that throat I had excellent spirits, and having once inured myself to not being disturbed by what people said, I could even joke about the throat to them myself, and tell them we should none of us have known anything about it but for the old lady with the gold eye-glass, a remark my father had once made in fun when a throat-discussion was going on.

"And this was true at the time, for I am sure if it had not been for her, the little fits of weakness and poorliness I used occasionally to have, would have been attributed to common causes, although I was perhaps oftener out of sorts than most children of my age.

"But as time went on we quite ceased to joke about the old lady with the eye-glass, for every now and then *that throat*, which was at all times swollen inside, (it was this which made my voice peculiar,) used to get so terribly sore and painful from inflammation, that I could hardly speak or swallow, and had to go to bed and be nursed, sometimes for many days.

"And after this followed a much worse phase of my throat-trouble; for, not to speak of the illness and pain, no sooner was I recovered and in good spirits, and as I thought and felt, ready for anything, than the care of *that throat* was in my way at every turn. In the first place they thought it was cold which had made it so bad, and when I wanted to go out and run about, there was always a discussion as to whether the weather was fit and it was safe—*with that throat.* I cannot tell you half the little trials of this sort which fell upon me then, but it seemed to my impatient spirit as if they made out that the weather was scarcely ever really fit for me to go out in. In the early morning it was too raw, in the evening it was too damp. In windy weather they feared lest the breezes should get in at my ears; in dull weather they talked of rainy clouds, and in stormy weather I was kept altogether in-doors.

"Now, you children who can enjoy a run before breakfast, and come in with rosy cheeks and an appetite, and play out of doors in the evening in any sort of tolerable weather, without being in any way poorly, just consider what I must have felt—

what I really did feel—in being debarred from so much of these natural enjoyments! For the very spirits with which God had blessed me, though they were so useful in enabling me to bear cheerfully all that happened, made me also full of desire to be and do just like other people. But this was not to be. The morning run, which invigorated others, left me paler than ever, and made me feel languid and weak; and any attempt at defiance of weather, or accidental neglect of care, was sadly apt to be followed by an attack.

"And presently came a new puzzle. Those attacks would happen occasionally in summer, when there could be no question of cold; but on the contrary, when the heat was very intense. And I dare say you will be ready to laugh when I add that they discovered now that heat was quite as bad for *that throat* as cold; indeed, if anything, worse. But droll as this seems to you, who are none of you doctors to know how it all was, you must admit that it was very sad for me.

"And soon they found out something else—namely, that bodily weariness was almost worse for *that throat* than either cold or heat; and was more likely than anything else to bring on one of my suffering attacks.

"It was all very true; but think of how this shut me out from the common enjoyments of others! A long summer day's expedition for instance—you most of you know, I dare say, how delightful it is—scarcely ever failed to make the pale face paler

than before, much as I enjoyed the exertion and fun at the time—no one more so, I believe: and then would follow a day or two of languor and weakness, and then the 'poor little thing,' now a big girl, was once more laid upon a bed of sickness and pain.

"Yes, real sharp pain, which would sometimes keep me from sleep, stop my eating, and make me more helpless and weak, than I am now, even as an old woman.

"These were sad times; but yet no sooner had the recovery come than, as before, my spirits triumphed over everything, and no one was livelier or more ready for exertion than myself.

"And then began again a struggle as before—as ever, I may say, between what I felt the desire to do, and what I was not allowed to do, because of *that throat*—that throat which would neither let me run nor walk, nor garden, nor play at ball, nor dance, nor shout, nor go out, nor sit out, nor drive out, nor ride out, nor get up, nor go to bed, like any of my sisters or young companions!

"I think I need say very little more of this part of my life—the age between childhood and young-womanhood. That throat was at the time a constant harass, I must own, and I should not like to live the time over again. But in looking back I am never surprised to recollect how lively I was through all my misfortunes, unless just at the moments of actual pain. For in truth I was surrounded with every comfort which could be procured, and with every amusement my parents could afford, to while away the hours of sickness when they came. And

then those natural God-given spirits, there is no saying how they prevented gloom ever gathering round me! My mind was always at work: I had good instruction. Reading, learning, and drawing, were real enjoyments to me, so that as soon as I could use a book or a pencil, I was as happy as ever; and many were the droll jokes I used to get up even for a doctor's visit—many the pleasant fancies which filled my brain as I lay following the pattern of the paper on the wall with my eye. Invention throve as well in the sick room, and with *that throat*, as it could possibly have done had I been able to climb to the top of Snowdon every day with impunity. Nay, perhaps better; so that children younger than myself used to consider it quite a treat to get into my company, I could amuse them so well with stories, or acting, or fun of one sort or another. Yes! I have known a time when some would far rather come in to sit with me, than remain out with the others, let the summer evening be ever so fine, or the out-door games ever so cheerful.

"I have known this the case even when that most bewitching of all treats, rustic tea in a wood, was in hand; a pleasure I could seldom share, on account of *that throat*, further than to help to carry the kettle and tea-things to the spot. There were always some who thought it still better fun to stay in-doors, and hear my rambling talk.

"By which you see that even this long second phase of my throat-troubles had its alleviating comforts, wearisome as it was in the privations and

worry it caused; of which I have not told you a hundredth part; for it would be impossible now to recall the thousand little ways in which, day by day, the contest between my lively will and miserable want of power, was carried on. Enough that I had to yield, or suffer for resistance.

"And then by degrees a third change came. For I became both stouter and in many ways less sickly and weak, as I grew up, and attacks in my throat came rather seldomer. But, alas! when they did come, their severity, and sometimes length of duration, were so great, that there was sadness all through the household for the poor suffering girl, and my mother's pain-stricken unsmiling face at those times, haunts me yet.

"And if you ask what brought on these terrible attacks, I must answer—all the same things as before; but others, alas! too. Still, if I sat up too late, and so had not sleep enough; or if I was chilled by too much cold, or exhausted by too much heat, or wearied by too much exercise, or excited by too much amusement—I was liable to break down. But in addition to these former risks were others. *Now*, if I pursued with too much delight and ardour the very occupations which had been the solace of my sick hours before—*i. e.* if I read too much or talked too much, or almost studied at all—there was once more a hue-and-cry about the pale face and *that throat*, and I was liable—I must own it now—to be attacked in the old painful way. For now the medical men assured us again and

again that of all things in the world over-exertion of brain was one of the very worst for that throat: indeed, that I must do almost nothing at all!

"Here was a blow indeed! My body had been long ago given up as incapable of the average amount of labour; and now my poor brain was to submit to the same restraint. I, active, lively-minded, with a craving for intellectual improvement —a perfect delight in learning and striving—was ordered to check all these aspirations, and be as idle, lounging, and do-nothing, as possible.

"I confess this was a trial I found very hard to bear. Very hard indeed it seemed when I was happy over my books, to have my mother open the door and come up to me and say, with the old troubled face, 'It makes me wretched, my love, to see you so hard at work; you cannot do it with impunity, with that throat. You absolutely *must* not work your brain!' Work my brain! my dears, I was allowed to work nothing—leg and limb, and head and thought, were all to be tied down to repose; and exercise allowed to nothing but the spirit of patience and submission; and this third phase of throat trials fell heavier upon me in that respect than any which had preceded it.

"Yet no—I will not say that either; for by the time it overtook me—God be praised for it!—I had learnt to acknowledge and reverence practically, the Ruling Hand without which not even a sparrow falls to the ground: and so you see, my dear children, that by the time the trouble became heaviest,

I knew whence it had come, and had learnt to pray for grace to bear it with a quiet mind. And it soothes me now, as an old woman on the verge of the grave, to recollect that I did not ask that grace in vain.

"But even yet I have one more, and that the most painful trial, to recall. With the serious thoughts which sprang up within me when I found myself almost a young woman, came a strong desire to be of some use in the world—to do somebody good, if I could not myself be all I wished. And with this view, my dears, and being at the time comfortably well, I betook myself zealously to village visiting; obtained permission to have a little school of my own for a couple of hours every morning, of the very poorest children I could find, whose parents could not afford to send them elsewhere; and on Sundays I had a class of young women twice a day, into whose brains I laboured with all my might to instil the meaning as well as the words of our immortal Catechism. Besides which I established a lending-library, and fixed another evening in the week for giving out the books.

"It was a very pretty scheme, and everybody seemed pleased with it and were ready to help, only I must own that once or twice, while discussions about my scholars and classes and library were going on, I detected on my mother's face a shade of misgiving and discomfort.

"Nothing was said, however, and I did not think much upon the matter; and what I did think was,

I am sorry to say, that my poor mother was rather unreasonable and fanciful now and then, and that this was one of the cases.

"And all went on swimmingly for a time; but by degrees (I am obliged to own it) I became aware myself that on Sunday evenings I felt very languid and tired; very much, in fact, as I used to feel after a summer day's expedition in old times.

"Ah! and I recall sadly now my mother's anxious inquiries, and my assurances that nothing was the matter. Well, nothing was the matter that I could describe, and I refused to own, even to myself, that teaching the Catechism to village girls could by any possibility do me any harm.

"Here was no question now of mere personal pleasure and 'self-seeking,' as it is called. Surely this desire to be doing good to my fellow-creatures was a very different affair. Surely I might expect that God's blessing would be upon it, and that He would permit it to succeed.

"Ah, my dears, God's ways are not so easily traced out, and about these I was still as ignorant a child as when I wanted to play at ball longer than my strength would allow.

"But I did not see this then, for the old spirit within would not allow me to yield without a struggle.

"But I had to yield at last, for God's call upon me was in another direction. Not, as I fondly wished to believe, along the (to me) really pleasant sunny paths of energetic usefulness, but, for a time,

in the dull overclouded one of patient submission to a mode of life, of all others the most distasteful to my nature;—inaction and rest.

"You will guess what else I have to tell. The two hours' daily schooling, one of which took place an hour before, and the other an hour after, breakfast, (the meal being dismissed during a ten minutes' interval,) began after a time to leave me as languid for the rest of the morning as the Sunday classes had left me in an evening. First my breakfast appetite failed, and then my strength; and at last a time of unfavourable weather brought a chill and an utter break-down, and an illness, the sufferings of which it is still grievous to me to recall; not only from what I went through myself, but from the recollection of the stonily sad face of my mother as she went about from day to day, and at last told me in her most serious way that I had once more undertaken more than my strength would allow.

"But this was not the way in which she worded it *then*. What she really said was, '*more than it is God's will you should be able to do;*' an expression which fell severely upon my feelings at the time, but of which, when I thought it over, I was quite unable to deny the truth.

"Well! once more I recovered, and once more my spirits rose; and once more, to a certain extent, the old contest began again. But I was somewhat shaken I own, and could no longer argue and defend my position as confidently as I should have done a few months before. And during the many leisure

hours of my recovery I advanced a step further still; for my mother and I had many quiet discussions of the whole matter; of my whole past life in fact; of our being often led by the Almighty in the way *we* think *least good for us*, as well as like least ourselves; of our characters being formed as He would have them, by the very circumstances which seem of themselves a bar to any improvement at all; of our even being made most useful to others, when every power of usefulness seems taken away by us; a fact especially and constantly shown in the case of confirmed invalids.

"I was recovering, and lying on the sofa while we talked, and used to watch my mother's face as she spoke; and the remembrance of those conversations has remained with me for life, and been of use again and again. They gave me more insight into the meaning as well as the mystery of different courses of human life, and taught me more knowledge of myself than I had ever had before.

"As I said, however, I was not entirely cured; but I was now so thoroughly in earnest in promising and intending to be careful, that my mother gave way so far as to allow me to return to a portion of the duties I had laid out for myself; and probably my lively earnestness, coupled with returning health, overpowered her into permitting more than even at that moment she thought wise. For she ended our long chapter of arrangements by assuring me she was convinced that 'those talkings and teachings and straining efforts to drive into dull heads the clear

ideas of intelligent ones, were all out of the question as a continued occupation for a person—*with that throat.'*

"However, although my morning school was not resumed, I had an evening class once a week, and one on the Sunday; the other being taken by my sister, who also managed my library when the weather was cold, and the draughty little room in which the business was unavoidably transacted was not safe for me.

"It was a well-meant experiment, but it failed. At the end of another half year I was laid up again, though not by any means for so long a time as usual.

"And then I gave way unreservedly; and, even when well again, proposed to do no more than my mother actually *advised!*

"So, at last, all fight and argument were over; and how much more at ease I felt, in consequence, I can hardly tell you. Nay, I began now to smile at myself and my old obstinacy, and even made my poor mother do the same. For we used to bring forward the question of what I was able or unable to do, and might or might not do—*with that throat,* as a sort of little joke, however seriously we intended to settle it.

"One of the subjects, which always suggested the inquiry, was what I might read; and my delight then was to make my mother laugh, by accusing her of maintaining that no books but Walter Scott's novels were fit for a person—*with that throat!*

"And dears, I can safely assure you, that *in spite*

of that throat, I was as happy as any one I knew; for no sooner had I given up thinking it *hard* not to be able to do all I wished, than, somehow or other, there seemed to be scarcely any trial in it at all. For, dear me! if I could not work at anything hard for any length of time, the variety of my occupations was endless. I was fond of such a host of things; and I advise you all to be the same. And so, if I did see my mother glancing anxiously at my German books when I had been under Schiller enchantment for an hour or so, I used to throw them aside determinately at once, and if fine, go out and garden or sketch, or visit in the village; and if rainy, think to myself whether a tatting trimming would not be a great improvement to my last new petticoat. Ah, my dears! it is easier to tell you the troubles of my young life, than to number half its pleasures, and interests, and blessings, even with a throat!

"And now I have quite a pleasant page to turn over, for by degrees the words of the doctors, and of the old lady with the gold eye-glass, were coming true. I was gradually, as the former worded it, *losing my throat.* The attacks in it came very seldom, and were very slight; and at last they did not come at all. It is very true the old precautions were still taken, and *that throat* was still talked of; but this was from long habit. In point of practical fact my throat was gone!

"I have not much more to tell. A doctor had once assured me that I should *sing* by the time I was twenty-five, an accomplishment I had always par-

ticularly wished to possess, partly, I fear, because it was out of my reach—*with that throat;* but I sang long before that respectable age, as my son can tell you, who has often heard his father talk of the impression my voice made upon him the first evening we met. And I was married on my twenty-fifth birthday, some years after my throat had ceased to be talked about by everybody except my poor dear mother, who, in spite of the happy reality, had still occasional pangs of anxiety, and never quite laid aside the old phrase.

"So much so that on the very morning of my marriage, when she saw me with only a white veil on my head—the day being rather cold and blustering—she exclaimed quite anxiously, 'But, my dear child, you are surely not going out without something more on—*with that throat?*'

"My only answer was to throw my arms round her neck, and our tears flowed together, even at that happy moment, over old recollections. Tears, however, they were of gratitude and thankful acknowledgment.

"There, my dears, I have done! And I have told you this story in order that those among you who are well may be thankful for a blessing not vouchsafed to everybody, as you see; also that those who are apt to be occasionally poorly may be grateful that they are not so often so as I was; and that those—if there should be any such here—who are delicate and seldom really well, may see from my

case that there may be peace, and even happiness and usefulness, in a life of sickness as well as in a life of health."

And so ended the tale of "Grandmamma's Throat;" but there was still another sheet of note-paper unread. This proved to be a postscript to Aunt Judy's letter, and was to the following effect, which puzzled the little ones very much for some time, but they contrived to make it out at last:—

P.S.—I must now let you all into a secret, for you know I never deceive anybody about anything. I dare say you may have noticed that mention is made in this account of "Grandmamma's Throat" of Sir Walter Scott's novels. I wonder whether any of you have thought to yourselves that Sir Walter Scott's novels were not written so long ago as when grandmamma must have been young? Nor were they; so you must talk it over with each other whether you think grandmamma did really tell the story or not.

I will tell you what happened to me that night at the old castle. I found my bed-room a very curious place, and the road to it very odd too. Along three passages, up two flights of real stairs, and two or three steps here and there besides. And there was a very tall canopy to the bed, from which hung long curtains of old-fashioned red silk damask. Moreover, there was a huge projecting peaked front to the fire-place, which went up nearly to the ceiling,

and in which bacon could easily have been hung. Then the legs of the oak writing-table by the fire had griffin's claws for feet; and to this at last I sat down to write to you. For I had that morning got your letter all about the mumps, and the ball, and the new scrap-book, and I wanted to amuse you by giving you a long account of the old castle.

But describing an old castle is no such easy matter. One tells such a quantity of stupid things, merely to be exact, and so many people have told the very same things so often before that they seem quite dull. Besides which, I was tired; for the *real truth* is, we had been dancing all the evening! So I went to bed with a sort of muddle in my head, about you, and the old castle, and the grandmamma of the house, who really had shown us her japanned boxes and curiosities. And before I dozed completely off, all sorts of foolish things came into my head; as, for instance, that the red silk damask curtains had been her wedding dress—that *was* nonsense, wasn't it? Also that the peaked projecting front of the fire-place was the pattern of her last nightcap. Wasn't that more silly still? And so I fell asleep. But when I woke in the morning a number of other things came into my head about grandmamma, some of which were not silly at all. It was true, remember, that she had been delicate; it was true, too, that there she was now, a cheerful old lady of ninety, with a nice tint of colour in her cheeks.

And so, dear No. 6, I thought grandmamma should tell her story, if I could make her do so, for

the benefit of little girls who are invalided when they want to go to balls or elsewhere.

You must accept it, therefore, as founded on fact, but consider the story-teller to be

Your ever affectionate

AUNT JUDY.

THE COUNCILLOR

THE BLACK BAG.

THE Black Bag was not merely a black bag, but an institution. A club or society, in fact, established for the encouragement of domestic literature, each member being expected to contribute one or more original papers towards a general collection, destined to be read aloud in the family, during the Christmas gatherings.

They might be short or they might be long, serious or funny, prose or poetry; but *some*thing each member must contribute, or have his or her name struck off the list: such was the rule.

And inasmuch as these contributions were to be deposited, until the time of reading, in a black cloth bag, that sable receptacle gave the name to the society itself.

A bag of black cloth seems an odd thing to have chosen for such a purpose, but it was an old bag, and there was a history attached to it which made it respectable.

No doubt there are histories attached to all old

clothes, if one could find them out, and many of them very affecting ones. But this was a quite peculiar case. The black cloth of which this bag was made, had formed part of a cloak which had been worn at the funeral of him whom Tennyson calls the

"Saviour of the silver-coasted isle,"

by one of the saddest of the mourners. It used to be spoken of as "Lord Nelson's funeral cloak."

No wonder, therefore, that even by a second generation of contributors, this particular black bag was held in an estimation which no modern leathern one, however superior in itself, could have commanded.

Then again, there was an attraction in the very fact of its having survived to serve, under the same name, and for the same purpose, children's children. When the new owners took possession, they knew that it had held in its dark inside the effusions of many who had long ago passed out of the dim thoughts and efforts of this life, to the brighter illuminations of the one beyond, and that even the youngest of those whose hands had formerly dropped their papers into it, had since travelled a long long way on the journey of life.

The little ones did not think much about all this, it is true, but it served to make the old bag venerable, and perhaps rather mysterious, in their eyes; and a happier day was scarcely ever passed by them than that on which Aunt Judy begged the bag from mamma; enrolled the whole party, down to No. 8

himself, as contributors, and wrote out in good print characters a list of their names as *Members of the Black Bag Club.*

And although this took place during the Midsummer holidays, and Christmas was therefore a long way off, visions of glory passed at once before all the young eyes, and there was among the little ones a fever to set to work to their contributions directly; and the demand for pencils, paper, and even pens and ink, was almost overwhelming to the elders.

But this zeal gradually cooled down. A few attempts made them all aware that it is much easier to talk than to write; and in the lull which followed this discovery, they argued that, as they had plenty of time before them, there was no occasion to write *just then.*

The *just then* was extended, however, to late in the autumn, and it was not till Aunt Judy, in some of her letters, inquired whether the Black Bag contributions were nearly ready, that the party began to think seriously of their responsibilities, and make further efforts. But they set to work now in such good earnest, that mamma declared she was all day long picking up bits of paper with the beginnings of stories upon them, the self-rejected efforts of the young authors. One ran thus, for instance:—"*There was once upon a time a Giant who could twist his head round like a Parrot. He lived in a very large wood called—*" but here the MS. stopped for want of a name apparently. Another was in a more

familiar style:—"*There is a certain town, but I won't say where, and in one of the streets there lives the most troublesome old woman that ever was born. She always will look out of the windows to see what her neighbours are doing, and watch who calls upon them. And then she invents what's happening. So one day—*" Alas! that with such a beginning, an incident for the "one day" should have failed to suggest itself!

But this was not all. One of the papers was headed as follows:—"Epic Poem. 'Hannibal Crossing the Alps,' Book First;" and the author had got as far in his subject as—

"*Of Hannibal's great deeds, O Muse . . . .*"

The rest was a blank!

What could mamma do but smile? And by degrees, though not quite at first, the young writers began to smile too, and even enjoyed her proposal of some day finishing all their cast-off beginnings—the epic poem alone excepted—herself. Nay, they got quite fond of her joke of whispering in their ears, when she saw them at work, an old couplet which had really been a contribution to the Black Bag in the other generation:—

"Horatia has said with a very arch look,
For Horatia at times is a wag,
You will certainly get into my black book,
Unless you contribute to our Black Bag."

And presently it was decided that mamma should be taken into consultation as to what could be done,

for they couldn't write, they were afraid—so said several—anything that would be really good fun to read aloud at Christmas. And still they all wanted to belong to the Black Bag Club if possible. What *could* be done?

Mamma thought a bit, and then gave quite a legal answer. All clubs and societies had a right, she said, to make, by common consent, what are called bye-laws, for their own convenience and good. Laws, that is, arising out of circumstances which had not been known of or fully considered at first. So she proposed that there should be a *Black Bag Bye-Law*, to the effect that such of the members, as having fairly tried, should find themselves unable to write what was thought good enough for public reading, should be put into a separate list and considered "honorary members," the real contributors being styled "efficient,' that is, able to do their work, and taking the higher place. Honorary members, however, were allowed to be present at the opening of the Bag, and the reading of the contributions, just the same as the others, and had always the opportunity of rising to be efficient members as soon as they felt able.

This was capital; and as Aunt Judy wrote word that she thoroughly approved, the bye-law was written out and passed; everybody concerned in it consenting, and mamma putting her own name and their father's at the head of the honorary list. So the little ones were quite contented, and indeed felt the Black Bag affair to be more important than ever.

Moreover, mamma strongly counselled all to go on trying, and settled that all the attempts were to be submitted to Aunt Judy for her decision upon their merits.

So far, so good; but Aunt Judy's labours now began in earnest. Though still absent, she became the referee in all the difficulties of those who yet strove to write. Their scrawls were sent to her for correction, and for further suggestions, till she became more and more convinced that the real furnishing of the Black Bag for Christmas amusement must devolve upon *the few*, though all efforts were to be encouraged, and all tolerable compositions read, among the rest.

She had not quite made up her mind, however, how to throw in as much of her own help as possible, till one day, a letter from No. 5 at school, set the stream flowing.

"You see," he said, "the bore is, that one doesn't get hold of anything here to write stories about. If one was travelling, and going into out-of-the-way places, it would be easy enough. But lessons, and meals, and playing about, don't put anything of that sort into one's head. I've been sitting over the fire this evening trying to think, but what *could* come, with only the coals and fire-place before one to look at? I dare say neither Hans Andersen nor Grimm, nor any of those fellows, would have written anything, if they had not gone about into caves and forests and those sort of places, or boated in the North Seas. Anybody can write stories, when they

see lots of curious things to write about; don't you think so?"

Whether Aunt Judy thought so or not, will be seen from the following answer:—

"My dear No. 5,

"I read your letter while sitting over the fire with nothing before me, as you say, but the coals and the fire-place to look at; but the longer I looked, the more I decided that Hans Andersen was not beholden to caves or forests, or any curious things or people, for his story-telling inspiration. No one is, perhaps; but he, certainly, least of all. In further proof whereof, I wrote down the following fire-side effusion, which I enclose with some others for your private instruction and conviction. They are to be replaced, remember, after you have read them, in their proper envelopes, aud sealed, and sent as contributions to the 'Black Bag.' The little ones cannot write stories, and must be helped, so these must be accepted as what they would have written if they could.

"*You* may write or not, as you please, after convincing yourself from the enclosed that it is quite possible for a 'fellow,' or even for a girl, to spin a story upon things as little suggestive as a fire-place, or what is commonly called a 'dead wall.'

"Nos. 1, 2, and 3 are but jokes; imitations, in fact, of the Andersenian power of spinning gold threads out of old tow-ropes. But the Black Bag

readers will, I know, accept them in good part, as the supposed contributions of its very juvenile members. And Enclosure No. 4 will surprise mamma, who will find herself an authoress and Black Bag contributor, when she least expects it! Meantime, *your* trial is, to hold your tongue altogether about the contents of the enclosures, herewith enclosed to you. Seal them up after reading them, and seal up your lips too.

"Your affectionate

"AUNT JUDY."

ENCLOSURE I.

What No. 8 *would have written if he could.*

THE SMUT.

THE councillor's chimney smoked. It always did smoke when the wind was in the north. A Smut came down and settled on a brass knob of the fender, which the councillor's housekeeper had polished that very morning. The shining surface reflected the Smut, and he seemed to himself to be two.

"How large I am!" said he, with complacency. "I am quite a double Smut. I am bigger than any other. If I were a little harder, I should be a cinder, not to say a coal. Decidedly my present position is too low for so important an individual. Will no one recognize my merit and elevate me?"

But no one did. So the Smut determined to raise himself, and taking advantage of a draught under the door, he rose upwards and alighted on the nose of the councillor, who was reading the newspaper.

"This is a throne, a crimson one," said the Smut, "made on purpose for me. But somehow I do not seem so large as I was."

The truth is, that the councillor (though a great man) was, in respect of his nose, but mortal. It was not made of brass; it would not (as the cabinet-makers say) take a polish. It did not reflect the object seated on it.

"It is unfortunate," said the Smut. "But it is not fit that an individual of my position (almost, as I may say, a coal,) should have a throne that does not shine. I must certainly go higher."

But unhappily for the Smut, at this moment the councillor became aware of something on his nose. He put up his hand and rubbed the place. In an instant the poor Smut was destroyed. But it died on the throne, which was some consolation.

Moral.

More chimneys smoke than the councillor's chimney, and there are many Smuts in the world. Let those who have found a brass knob be satisfied.

ENCLOSURE II.

What No. 7 ought to have written if he would.

THE CRICK.

It was a Crick in the wall, a very small Crick too. But it is not always the biggest people who have the strongest affections.

When the wind was in the east, it blew the dust into the Crick, and when it set the other way, the dust was blown out of it. The Crick was of a warm and passionate temperament, and was devotedly attached to the dust.

"I love you," he whispered. "I am your husband. I protect, surround, defend, cherish you and house you, you poor fragile Dust. You are my wife. You fill all the vacant spaces of my heart. I adore you. I am all heart!"

And if vacant space is heart, this last assertion was quite true.

"Remain with me always," said the Crick.

"Ever with thee," said the Dust, who spoke like a valentine.

But the most loving couples cannot control destiny. The wind went round to the west, and the Crick was emptied in a moment. In the first thrill of agony he stretched himself and became much wider.

"I am empty," he cried; "I shall never be filled again. This is the greatest misfortune that could possibly have happened."

The Crick was wrong. He was not to remain empty; and a still greater misfortune was in store.

The owner of the wall was a careful man, and came round his premises with a trowel of mortar.

"What a crack!" said he; "it must be the frost. A stitch in time saves nine, however." And so saying, he slapped a lump of mortar into the Crick with the dexterity of a mason.

In due time the wind went back to the east, and with it came the Dust.

"Cruel Crick!" she wept. "You have taken another wife to your heart!"

And the Crick could not answer, for he had ceased to exist.

This is a tragedy of real life, and cannot fail to excite sympathy.

ENCLOSURE III.

What No. 6 might have written if she had tried.

THE BROTHERS.

THEY were brothers—twin brothers, and the most intense fraternal affection subsisted between them. They were Peas—Sweet-peas, born together in the largest end of the same Pod. When they were little, flat, skinny, green things, they regarded the Pod in which they were born with the same awful dread which the greatest of men have at one time felt for nursery authority. They believed that the Pod ruled the world.

It was impossible to conceive a limit to the power of a thing that could hold so tight. But in due time the Peas became large and round and black, and the Pod got yellow and shrunken, and was thoroughly despised.

"It is time we left the nursery," said the brothers. "Where shall we go to, when we enter the world?" they inquired of the mother plant.

"You will fall on the ground," said she, "in the south border, where we now are. The soil is good, and the situation favourable. You will then lie quiet for the winter, and in the spring you will come up and flower, and bear pods as I have done. That will be your fate. Not eventful, perhaps, but prosperous; and it comforts me to think that you are so well provided for."

But the best of parents cannot foresee everything in the future career of their children, and the mother plant was wrong.

The Peas burst from the Pod, it is true; but they fell, not into the south border, but into the hand of the seedsman to whom the garden belonged.

"This is an adventure," said the brothers.

They were put with a lot of other sweet-peas, and a brown paper-bag was ready to receive them.

"Any way we are together," said they.

But at that moment one of the brothers rolled from the bag on the floor. The seedsman picked him up, and he found himself tossed into a bag of peas.

"It is all right" said he; "I shall find my brother in time."

But though he rolled about as much as he could, he could not find him; for the truth is, that he had been put by mistake into a paper of eating peas; but he did not know this.

"Patience!" cried he; "we shall be sown shortly, and when we come up we shall find each other, if not before."

The other Pea thought that his brother was in the bag with him, and when he could not find him he consoled himself in the same manner.

"When we come up we shall find each other, if not before."

They were both sold in company with others, and they were both sown. No. 1 was sown in a cosy little garden near a cosy little cottage in the country. No. 2 was sown in a field, being intended for the market.

They both came up and made leaves, and budded and blossomed; and the first thing each did when he opened his petals, was to look round for his brother.

No. 1 found himself among other Sweet-peas, but his brother was not there; and soon a beautiful girl, who came into a garden to gather a nosegay, plucked him from his stalk.

No. 2 found himself also among peas—a field full—but they were all white ones, and had no scent whatever. He had been sown near the wall, and he leant against it and wept.

Just then a young sailor came whistling down the road. He was sunburnt but handsome, and he

was picking flowers from the roadside. When he saw the Sweet-pea he shouted.

"That's the best of the bunch," said he, and put it with the others. Then he went whistling down the road into the village, past the old grey church, and up to a cosy little cottage in a cosy little garden. He opened the door, and went into a room where a beautiful girl was arranging some flowers that lay on the table. When she saw him they gave a cry and embraced each other. After a while he said, "I have brought you some wild flowers; but this is the best," and he held up the Sweet-pea.

"This is not a wild flower," said she; "it is a garden flower, and must have been sown by accident. It shall be put with the other garden flowers."

And she laid the Sweet-pea among the rest on the table, and so the brothers met at last.

The young couple sat hand in hand in the sunshine, and talked of the past.

"Time seemed to go slowly while we were parted," said the young man; "and now, to look back upon, all our misery seems but a dream."

"That is just what *we* feel," said the Sweet-peas.

"I was very sad," said the young girl softly, "very sad indeed; for I thought you might be dead, or have married someone else, and that we might never meet again. But in spite of everything I couldn't quite despair. It seemed impossible that those who really loved each other should be separated for ever."

Meanwhile the Sweet-peas lay on the table. They

were very happy, but just a little anxious, for the lovers had forgotten to put them in water, and they were fading fast.

"We are very happy," they murmured, "very happy. This moment alone is worth all that we have endured. It is true we are fading before we have even fully bloomed, and after this we do not know what will happen to us. But the young girl is right. One cannot quite despair. It seems impossible that those who really love each other should be separated for ever."

ENCLOSURE IV.

The Story Mamma intended to have written if she had not been so very busy.

THE BIRDS IN THE NEST.

ONCE upon a time there was a nest in a wood; but I am not going to tell you either what sort of birds lived in it, or where the wood was. The story does just as well without these particulars, and impertinent curiosity ought never to be encouraged.

Besides, I have other reasons for silence, as you will find out by-and-bye; for are we not all of us birds, in one sense; creatures on the wing, and living in nests which the next gust may blow from under us, or us away from them, let us talk of our settled homes as we will?

And as to living in a wood, it is what everybody

does, more or less, at one time or another, as I will explain.

My great aunt, and therefore your great-great aunt, dears, used to sing a very funny song when I was a little girl. It began thus:—

"There was an old man, and he lived in a wood,
As you shall plainly see;
And he thought he could do as much work in a day
As his wife could do in three."

There was a pretty tune belonging to the words, and the echo of it comes sweetly over my mind now, as I recall those old days, when I stood by the piano-forte, not much taller than the keyboard, listening to both sound and sense with all my might.

But the might of young days is small. I verily believed then that the old man really lived in a real wood, though not a word more is said about it in the song; but on the contrary, so much about ploughing, milking cows, and malt-drying, that it is clear his home must have been a small farmhouse in an open country.

I did not find this out till long afterwards, though; when one day the truth suddenly dawned upon me that the wood in which the old gentleman lived, as the song promised we should "plainly see," was the mistake he made in supposing he could do as much work in one day as his wife could do in three. To live in a wood meaning here, to live under a delusion, to be in a confused blundering state of mind, as persons are likely to be who have got entangled in a wood and cannot find the way out.

After which discovery I liked the old song better than ever. And here let me take occasion to remark that it is a very great mistake to give children nothing to read, or to write nothing for them but what they can understand at once. Where there is nothing to find out—no calling forth of the wits—there can be no lasting interest; and even the prettiest nursery books of the sort soon become waste paper; while such a one as "The Pilgrim's Progress," on the contrary, remains milk for babes and meat for men from generation to generation; the simple pleasure of one age reflected on the mature enjoyment of the other; the mature enjoyment justifying and ennobling the old love of infancy: each heightening each.

But this is by-the-bye; only it forms a defence for the story in hand, in which something is left to be discovered.

What I am coming to is this. We all of us live in a wood in the sense I have been explaining. Taking up many fancies, that is; making many mistakes; acting under many delusions; cured of one error but to fall into another soon after, and in each one thinking ourselves right all the time; blundering and confused throughout, like a man astray in strange forests with no regular pathways marked out.

Enough then to say that once upon a time there was a nest in a wood which held eight of the dearest little eggs a hen-mother ever looked upon with joy. At least this particular hen-mother thought so, and

her mate rather agreed with her when they talked the matter over together. And his opinion had weight, for in his flights he sometimes saw other eggs, and would tell her about them on his return. But what could they be to her own? Nothing could be better than what was perfect, and her own were perfect in her eyes. What a fine shape they had! How beautifully rounded! How soft their tint! How tasteful the arrangement of spots! All others must needs be too light or too dark, or too something or other, to suit her particular taste. The sea-gull, who ate snails in the garden, boasted of his family egg as twenty times larger and twenty times more beautiful. "But if it *be* more beautiful, what can that matter to us?" said the hen-mother, in conclusion, "when ours are perfect in our eyes, and we are so very happy?"

"And shall be so much happier yet," pursued her mate, who, as a travelled bird, had had experience, and knew what was in store; "when the little ones awake to a life and enjoyment of their own, and can feed and sing, and know and love us both."

"Ah, to be sure, to be sure, that will be rapture indeed," cried the hen-mother. "Thank you so much for telling me! How silly I was, thinking I was as happy as I could possibly be. Of course I shall be happier by-and-bye; and how *very* happy that will be, for I am happy enough now. I wish the day were come!"

Yet she was very happy; but most so when she forgot she was to be happier still.

And by-and-bye the time came; and when the little ones were all hatched, and could peer about and see their father bringing food, and open their mouths and swallow it very fast, and cry for more,—

"Now then at last the happiness is perfect," said the hen-mother; "I have nothing further to wish for."

And she watched them being fed and satisfied, and never felt hungry herself, till they had had plenty and were at ease.

"Eight darlings in one nest! What a sight to fill one's heart! There may be trouble enough, it's true, and very little room to rest. But one's own eight beautiful creatures round one, under one's wing, all chirping and alive—this is perfection of happiness indeed!"

"You cannot say so just yet," sang the mate; but he did not tell her this quite at first. He waited for a soft evening in early summer before he piped about what was in store.

"You cannot say so just yet. Our darlings are very sweet, but they are poor helpless things at present. Wait till they have grown more feathers, have learnt to take care of themselves, and fly and sing. They cannot be perfect, nor can your happiness be perfect, till then. Some of our neighbours are beforehand with us. There were fine young birds among the boughs yesterday, twitting our youngsters in their songs with being behindhand altogether."

"They will not have to twit long, I suppose," exclaimed the hen-mother rather angrily. "Of

course you will bring ours forward as fast as you can. Of course they must not be behind their neighbours. Of course they must learn to take care of themselves, and fly and sing, like the rest. Dear, dear! how silly I was! But thank you so much for telling me! It's very well to be easily pleased, and the poor helpless things are very sweet, as you say; but of course it will be a much grander thing when they have grown to be fine young birds like those others; able to take care of themselves and to twit their neighbours who can't! And of course I shall be as happy again. I wish the time were come."

And it did come; but there was a great deal of trouble to be taken first. The little ones had to be nursed and fed till their feathers had grown, and then they had to be trained, by slow degrees and with much care, to use their young wings in flight. Now the hen-mother had left her mate no rest till he began to teach; for, first, she was jealous for her children's credit; and secondly, she wanted to feel what it was to be as happy as it was possible to be. Happy enough she was, but for this wish.

But alas! for the trouble and fear that came over her when the teaching really began! The eight darlings must come out of their nest, from under her wing; she could help them no longer—they could scarcely help themselves. Yet they must spread the feeble pinion, and strain the unpractised muscle, and run a risk of failure and even life, to ensure success.

Oh, poor hen-mother, what a trying change was this, though brought about by her own especial desire! No wonder that while the teaching was going on, she would sit and shake with fright, and wish all manner of foolish things. That they were back in the nest, of course; but far more than that—even that they were back in the old baby days again, in the egg-shells of their first existence, unconscious of life and of them. "They were all under my wing then, at any rate," said she; "my own dear little ones with me, and I with them: what more could I want?"

And, oh dear, when the youngsters were safe in the nest once more at night, how she used to gather them under her wings with joy!

"I am getting to like night better than day," said she at last to her mate, "for then my birds are in the nest again. You are training them very cleverly, I know, and I was the first to want them to be clever like other young birds, and they are getting cleverer day by day, I dare say. So I ought to be happier; but the happiness is not as pleasant as it was. How can it be, when they are away so much, and the empty nest stares me in the face? The risks are so many too, till they can really fly well, and I tremble with fear. But all is right at night, when you all come back and sing. Yes, if it wasn't for thinking of the morrow, the happiness would be perfect indeed then: if it were always evening, I mean, and they and you were always here."

"It is natural you should feel as you do," replied

the mate; "but you mistake the cause. If you are not quite happy yet, it is merely because things are not quite perfect, that is all. When the young ones can fly really well, for instance, there will no longer be any risk, and when they can sing better still, our music will be pleasanter than ever. And when they are able and independent, all your cares and anxieties will be at an end. Wait a little longer, and you will be happy indeed."

The hen-mother sighed. "I suppose you must be right," said she; "I will wait. But if I could sing myself, I would sing a mother's song about the birds in the nest. It may not have been perfection, but it was a very happy time."

So she waited and did her best to be pleased. But for longer and longer intervals the empty nest stared her in the face, and she thought many things she did not dare to say—the old foolish wish that they were all in their egg-shells again.

Still, every evening, when they came back and perched in the boughs if not in the nest, and the singing grew sweeter and sweeter, she cheered up and rejoiced once more.

And now at last the nestlings were full-grown birds, and could fly and sing as well as their parents. Perfection had come; they were independent; nobody's young birds could twit them now. "But now, of course," said their father, "they must go out and seek their fortunes, as we did, and choose mates, and settle in life for themselves. You see the justice of this?"

The hen-mother, to whom he was speaking, answered "Yes," but her heart was half broken. And when he added, "This is the real perfection of happiness to parents," she made no answer at all.

"It ought to be, perhaps," thought she to herself, "but it isn't so with me. I wonder why?" She sat on the edge of the empty nest and wondered still; but she couldn't find out the secret there.

Then the young ones piped to her from the woods; and said she, "Things are altered, I see; I will go to them!" and the very thought comforted her as she flew away. And when she had found them, and watched them in the full enjoyment of their own young life—listened to them as they warbled merrily to each other among the trees, or sported with friends here and there, she began to understand the whole matter. She was rejoicing in their joy rather than in her own.

And time went on: and one day as she sat, so listening, on a branch in the centre of the wood, her mate by her side; said she, "It is all becoming quite clear, and I can see that you were right on the whole. This is nearer the perfection of happiness than anything else could be, but the quite perfect is not to be had. Still, this is nearest and best; whether sweetest or not, I scarcely know. But thank you for telling me! I was selfish before: wanted my own darlings to myself, under my own wing, in my own particular nest—safe, as I called it—foolish that I was! Oh, narrow, narrow thought! As if one place was safer than another, when the

sun looks down everywhere, streaming warmth and comfort upon all! I see things differently now. The wood is but a larger nest, and those that live in it but a larger family. I spread out my love a little wider, and behold my happiness spreads out too! Though each in turn, for a time, must form his own little circle of joy, the whole must form one larger circle together; and who knows where it is to end?"

She ceased, and then listened again, and truly the wood was ringing with melodies: her mate by her side; her children now here, now there with the dear ones they loved. The circle grew wider and wider as time went further on.

But by-and-bye, when age had crept over both, the mate had tender thoughts himself of old times, and tenderer still for her. She had not been wrong altogether, he whispered softly and kindly. It was not selfishness only that had filled her heart. He would sing her the song she used to wish she could have sung herself—a mother's song about the birds in the nest.

And it went to the hearts of both.

* * * * * *

Other mothers in other nests, lift up your souls, as the circle widens from your feet. "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all," has all together now in the circle of His care; yea, even though a world, or the change we call death, may seem to divide them: and HE will bring His own together at last into one home—the "Father's House:"—one home, be the mansions never so many!

BLOTTING-BOOK VISIONS.

THE GOSSIP OF A BLOTTING-BOOK.

"However we brave it out, we [illegible] a little [illegible]
[illegible]

MY DEAR No. 3,

WHAT could possibly put it into your head to ask *me* for a "good gossiping letter about everybody?" I know you mean no harm, and [illegible] diesse; but do you not know that I [illegible], abominate, gossip; and if there [illegible] English language, or in your [illegible] Greek, which still more strongly [illegible], may consider it as used on the present occasion; my conviction being that half the ill-nature in the world is caused by that most mischievous amusement called tittle-tattling. Really *caused* by it, I should; for in nine cases out of ten it is [illegible] which makes people ill-natured, not ill-natured [illegible] makes [illegible] Rochefoucault would [illegible] of [illegible], he was his time to perceive [illegible] that [illegible] than they know [illegible] ling

BLOTTING-BOOK VISIONS.

THE GOSSIP OF A BLOTTING-BOOK.

"However we brave it out, we men are a little breed."
TENNYSON'S *Maud.*

MY DEAR No. 3,

WHAT could possibly put it into your head to ask *me* for a "good gossiping letter about everybody?" I know you mean no harm, and spoke out of mere idlesse; but do you not know that I hate, detest, abominate, gossip; and if there be any word in the English language, or in your favourite Latin and Greek, which still more strongly expresses dislike, pray consider it as used on the present occasion; my conviction being that half the ill-nature in the world is caused by that most mischievous amusement of tittle-tattling. Really *caused* by it, mind; for in nine cases out of ten it is gossiping which makes people ill-natured, not ill-nature which makes them gossip. Rochefoucault would dispute this of course, for it was his line to persuade people that they were wickeder than they knew of, by telling

them they were; and he would doubtless have pronounced the taste for gossiping to arise from our all hating each other at the bottom of our hearts, and therefore rejoicing not only in each other's misfortunes but sins; so that the hearing of them becomes a pleasure in itself.

Which miserable theory, begging the great man's pardon, and that of his disciples of the present day, I utterly deny; believing on the contrary that, with a few horrible and one hopes rare exceptions, gossiping is cultivated and loved, merely for want of a better occupation, as a means of stirring the blood, sending a tingle through the emotional part of us, and so breaking the monotony of an otherwise dull life. We all need excitement for the mind, as we do exercise for the body. I do not believe those who think they can do without it; but it is dangerous work to get it out of the "*parler de son voisin et de sa voisine*"—for of course praising people all round is dull enough; and finding fault is the only chance of anything like "fun." And then those have the chair (take the lead that is) who have the choicest enormities to tell, and can make the circle stare most: —whence exaggeration, and babbling of secrets, and all the horrible *et ceteras* that follow.

Of course one's feelings on this as on all other subjects depend greatly upon one's *bringing up*; and I am not presuming to find fault with others or boast of being right myself, pray observe!

If I do hate gossip, I owe the fact to having been so educated as not to want it as a resource from

ennui, and I only wish that every one was equally fortunate. If one could give the gossipers higher tastes and nobler subjects of interest, more exciting pursuits in fact, gossiping would die out, not only because it is wrong, but because it would be found dull, stupid, "slow," as you boys would call it, by comparison.

You may see by this that I am disposed to be very charitable to those who have drifted into this vile excitement for lack of a better. Only let those mend who can! Few people can look round life without finding something more worth caring about than how other people are managing their affairs or their families.

I am writing to you upon a very large thick old blotting-book, which some ten or fifteen years ago must have taken two quires of blotting-paper to fill his handsome morocco cover, and who must have been in his day as fine a specimen of his kind as ever lay on a nobleman's library table. But he has ceased to be able to blot, and the lady of the house apologized for him as she passed just now, and brought me a separate piece of blotting-paper for use; saying it was time the old book was refilled, but she delayed the operation from some lingering dislike to destroying a relic of so many years standing. . . . . .

Now then, gossipmonger! up go your ears, and you would fain know whether the lady "sighed" as she spoke, and whether one could find any mysterious romances blotted into the treasured pages. . . .

I know not. They are crossed and recrossed with lines till no blotting nature remains in them, so stiff and sapless have they become; like an old man's frame—like a fashionable young man's heart! . . .

Nevertheless, as the twilight deepens round me, and the evening shadows darken, some strange table-turning vitality seems to steal into the old book . . . Are there, then, two sorts of life in the world;—the active one with which we are born, the passive one which one involuntarily infuses into everything one touches, handles, uses? . . . .

The philosophers must decide. Listen, meanwhile, you who love gossip, to the gossip of a Blotting-book of twenty years old. Its favoured *medium* is,—

Your affectionate

AUNT JUDY.

THE GOSSIP OF A BLOTTING-BOOK.

"WHAT I *could* say if I would! Twenty years ago —a young lifetime in fact—I was laid on this luxurious table where you see me now, a perfectly new and magnificent Blotting-book. For a blotting-book can be magnificent in its way, and that I was.

"Fifty sheets doubled of the finest-grained, soft, red paper, were not thought too many for such a situation as I was to fill, for the sort of company I was to keep. Close before me stood a massive Buhl ink-stand, its scarlet taper rising erect from its centre, as if king over all; at my side lay a heavy mother-of-pearl paper-cutter, with a writhing fiery dragon for its handle. At one end of the table were the Peerage and the Army List; on the other, a London Directory and the best Almanack of the season; *the season* forsooth—twenty years ago! . . . What I *could* say, if I would!

"What I *could* say, if I would! She is right; the lady who says the old book wants refilling. Why should I alone be left darkened with the memories of the past? They are wiped out everywhere else as far as man can wipe them out. The Peerage of to-day is not the Peerage that was upon the table twenty years ago, when I was first laid here. It has been altered twenty times since then. The young folks of *then*, have some of them died, and some

grown old. "Heirs apparent" have slipped up into fathers' places, and their children stand where they stood before—twenty years ago. For bethink you what a time! Who leaves an old Peerage on a table like this? Let the dead bury their dead. People want life as it is, not as it was, even a year since. Why should I alone be burdened with outgrown records?

"There is an Army List on the table now. Take it up. It is of this year; as new and as full as the one of twenty years ago, only with a good many changed names. But who notices that save those who are counting their dead, or going statistically over the casualties of war?

"So with the Almanack—the Almanack of the year. The year that now is, he is king; he never dies; his crown is of immortal green; cry hurrah for him! As for calendars of the bygone twenty; whose announcements have become recollections; whose eclipses and comets and changes of the moon are over, and cannot stir a pulse of the blood—begone with them! A wise custom orders that they shall be hidden away; that a new one shall be brought to light as the new year comes in, in the place of each last. Vanish, ghost! and let us forget.

"Twenty years of almanacks, twenty years of days and hours; bethink you of all they brought and took away. Who would wish to bear them either in sight or mind? Let them rest under cypress and rue!

"But I yet remain, and bear the burden; the burden of those twenty years; let us look back then for once.

"Twenty years ago the bride was led home to this gorgeous house, and wrote her first note of joy to her distant mother; the first words of human thought that sank into my breast. Turn to the centre pages, gossipmonger, if you will, and read backwards if you can. A fragment may reveal a tale:—

"'*So, dearest mother, rejoice. Shed no more tears for me, the happiest of happy brides, but no less your own loving daughter*—AGATHA.'

"'*Postscript.—Speak out as ever. Do not see me spoilt by too much happiness (my only fear) without a warning word.*'

"Twenty years? it seems a century since such a fear (the young bride's only one!) could have been possible! Yet there the sentence lies; shadow outlasting substance; words surviving the truth of what they said.

"—Too much happiness, in a condition of social life in which tattling over other people's doings is as regular a business as the baking of bread?

"—Too much happiness, while the only study of which no one tires is that of other people's affairs?

"—Too much happiness, while babbling and revealing of secrets in confidence go on as if the dirty streams would flow for ever? It was a vain fear indeed!

"It is no use talking of exceptions. Of course there are some. Some people who are too busy, others who are too conscientious, to become pryers into what it concerns them not, to know. But I am

not thinking of exceptions. I wish the exceptions were the rule! I wish the kindness that lies buried in my pages outbalanced the folly and the evil. If it did, I should not be grumbling now, should not wish to be free from what I hold.

"But was that bride an exception, you ask? If she were, she suffered as all exceptions suffer. Those who don't float with the stream have to buffet the waves. Every fool knows that!

"Now answer me something. How long did the bride need warning words from her mother, to save her from being spoilt by too much happiness, think you? She, with the idlers and busy-bodies of "society" at her heels, picking holes in the folds of her skirt, since their fingers lacked other employment—merely that! and pointing them out to others by way of something to talk about—merely that!—

"Merely that!—merely idleness engendering chatter, and chatter folly, and folly mischief,—merely that!

"Didn't visitors come at once with their criticisms, and friends with candid remarks. And wasn't it the lounge of the morning to sit discussing society's three cardinal tests—appearance, manners, and dress? Ay, and talk over the people whose bread the talkers were eating?

"Whether she were worthy of him; whether he were worthy of her; whether he mightn't perhaps have done better, had he chosen that Miss Somebody-else; or she by accepting the other gentleman, who would certainly have proposed had she waited? Whether they were, either of them, worthy of their

fortune; whether their fortune were worthy of them?—with *et ceteras* I sicken to recall!

"And up and down went the shuttlecocks of opinion, backwards and forwards from one to the other, gathering everything everybody had heard said, as they flew; and came down the same shuttlecocks still, only laden with more nonsense than ever.

"Fools! what else came of their talking the people over? *Any*thing? could they change one hair of their heads for better or for worse; make them wiser, better, handsomer, happier, more worthy of each other or of their fortune, or their fortune more worthy of them?

"A thousand times, no! No one hoped or intended such a result.

"Then what came of their talking the people over? Did they mean to tell them what they thought, and offer them help and advice?

"A million times, no! They neither cared enough, nor dared enough, either; even had they really thought advice needed,—which they did not.

"Then what came of their talking the people over? Some secret good to *themselves?* Did *they* thereby become wiser, better, handsomer, happier; more worthy anybody or anything?

"A million times, a million times, no! Nay, from talking they fell to writing, which was worse; put the folly upon record, which otherwise might have passed off like smoke: spread the chatter they had chattered in idleness, further still; each to each's dear distant friend to be chattered up and down by

a dozen more such: leaving me stained and darkened with the criss-cross scribble of mischief! I had but one hope as it fell upon me; and that was that it could scarcely be read!

"Too much happiness, while gossip moves in circles like a storm-wind, and is sure to come back whence it started, only strengthened a thousand-fold by its tour. Too much happiness! the fear did not last long. I traced that in her notes.

"'Ah, but,' say you, 'the natural events of life bring natural changes and causes of grief. Lives burn away and go out like the tapers in the Buhl inkstand opposite, (well for those that shed light while they last!) no one can hinder this. *She* had a child and lost it.'

"Who would wish to hinder it? I answer. There are better things in store. Great decrees bring great consolations; death, the highest of all. I blotted it for the young wife when her little one was snatched from the arms which had but just learnt to enfold it. *I* shuddered, but words dropped from her pen which showed she knew of a glory beyond the taper light, and was satisfied. Large trials call out large efforts, and people rise higher and higher. It is the small vexations that are hard to live under calmly—that nag at the heart-strings, and will not let happiness be happy in peace; it is the dirty backwaters of gossip that undermine the harmony of life.

"Oh, the envyings and grudgings, the petty detractions and one-sided judgments, I have been forced to record! And this from people who drank of the

cup, and lay in the bosom of their friends. Had they neither sense nor feeling to see that they were turning a blessing into a curse; a power which enables man to interchange wisdom and affection with his absent fellows, into a means of disseminating mischief afar off; or when least guilty, yet guilty of transmitting, from one point of the compass to another, the folly that should have died out where it rose?

"But this was not all. This was woman's work. The men helped sometimes.

"Let the gossipmonger listen! Here is fish for his net. When the child died there was worse than folly;—speculation and intrigue. There were no near relatives, and SHE was delicate . . . he might want another wife . . . but setting that aside, who would be heir in case . . . .?

"This was a knotty point, with many a curious twist and turn, but nothing could be lost by an effort,—why should it? So an effort must be made. And in flocked the vulture connection, men and women, wherever there was a chance—each spinning his own little web. Outside, all sympathy and tears, or smiles and cheerful support, as suited best: one hand offering friendship and assistance, the other penning schemes, and probabilities, and statistics for learned acquaintance in the distance. I writhe under them yet—those cold-blooded speculations into the future — those contradictory statements and plans. I writhe at the evil they meant, though that future laughed them to scorn. But no one

can guess in advance what the almanack to come has in store!

"Would you hear more, gossipmonger? You shall. Yet *I* betrayed no secrets: longed in vain for active life to be able. But the gossip that moves in circles took its course—the cormorants were many, and counterplotted each other, and back to the sick wife's ears came news of the knotty point, 'He might want another wife . . . . but setting that aside, who would be heir in case . . . . ?'

"The lily was bruised already, but it drooped lower now, and sadly and softly there fell into my bosom another note to a mother:—

"'*—Let me come to you, dearest Mother. Your tears will quiet mine. It is not for the little one I am fretting. He has passed early to the better inheritance; who could recall him? But to find that these people whom I trusted, who outwardly are so kind . . . .*

"'*—Perhaps my keener disappointment has made me the more sharpsighted of the two. I cannot blind myself longer . . . . that letter betrays scheming and deceit—the very anxiety of their looks distracts me . . . . but how happy for him not to suspect: it would distress him so much to know . . . .*

"'*—He shall never be worried if I can help it, as I have been worried myself. When they find it in vain they may desist . . . . anyhow we will wait. Meantime, let me come! A good hearty cry like a child will set these earthly troubles loose. I need not mind while* HE *is not influenced . . . .*

"'*That chapter in Patrick's Parable which describes 'society' in the Jerusalem above. . . What a comment upon ours!* . . . .

"'*As ever, your loving, though, alas! sorely troubled*—AGATHA.'

"Now, gossipmonger, wait awhile and think—if you can. Think that this is but one case—one—in an experience of twenty years! Think what I *could* say if I would? Think what I have to bear! Were there nothing but folly, only think what a mass! The folly of twenty years, what a weight! Twenty years ago who was not a fool; but who remembers it now? The writers have thrown it off like their clothes—like their gradually-changed flesh. But I retain it all crowded and heaped together—the bad and the good.

"It is true there has been good; I own it; grand have been the thoughts which have dropped on me from time to time! Beautiful the aspirations—tender the love—soothing the prayers—ennobling the hopes. But blurred, blotted, crossed, defaced, smothered, by the wider-spread trifles, and vanities, and nonsense, had there been nothing worse.

"Alas that it should be so! That I cannot thrust out these vain memorials and be free to fresh impressions—the impressions of the day and hour that now is.

"The new race may be changed; may be kinder, gentler, truer. People may have learnt to be sincere to one another at last; not in treacherous letter-parlance only; not speaking one thing to the face, another behind the back!

"There is more learning, more wisdom, more progress in the world now than there ever was before. I blotted an essay upon it for an author six months at least ago; almost the last effort I made, and it was a vain one; and in spite of learning, and wisdom, and progress, he swore at the mess I could not help causing, and at the badly-managed household where blotting-books were not refilled at the proper time!

"But the good things he talked about may have borne fruit since then; and first and foremost of reforms and blessings social life may have grown honest—there will never be too much happiness anywhere till then—trust the idlers and busy-bodies for that!

"But mind; I do say *social* life. Individuals are honest with themselves, they cannot help being so; every one in the deep of his heart. They know what they know, and from time to time the knowledge rises up like a vapour, flushing the whole man; behind it, sorrow; before it, fear; and often, through all, a strong desire (whence comes it?) of cleaving to the good, discarding the evil.

"But men and women with men and women in social life, in the intercourse of 'society' especially, what are they?

"Take paper, friend, and write on it *false*, or, if you like it better, *fools*; and dry, hardened, natureless as I am, I will blot the words into my heart.

"But I get excited, and talk wildly. Let us put it in a milder form. Let us use gentler phrases, more suited to those for whom I speak. Let us say

they are but too often neither *quite* honest nor *quite* wise.

"Psha! they dare not be the one, and they care not to be the other! I cannot talk pretty about it! They would own, I dare say, to just a little habit of flattering, when it was to make people at ease with themselves; just a little manœuvering when a desirable end was in view; just a little difference before and behind the back; just a little over-pretension when going to the wall was the alternative; just a little light chat about neighbours when no other amusement turned up; just a little nonsense when sense would be a bore.

"Just a little leaven of poison, in fact; forgetting that it will leaven the whole lump—that is all.

"But social life must wear a cloak, or whose vanity would not be torn off their backs? And social life must be frittered away, or, forsooth, 'society' would have no charms, would not sit lightly on the shoulder, would need a higher range of feeling and thought.

"Yet, alas for the wasted time so frittered, were there nothing else to regret!

"But I speak as a fool. The almanack is new from year to year. The Januaries come round to the Decembers as regularly as ever. There can be no question of wasting time, when time returns upon itself; or men feel as if it did;—the almanacks being always new.

"I wish I could feel the same, but old facts stare

me in the face and forbid it. There they lie, telling tales of twenty years that can never return; of time wasted, time abused.

"But every one has not learnt what *I* have learnt, who can look back on three phases of life.

"Do you get angry, gossipmonger?—have patience. You shall hear more about the bride at last. Let me tell my own gossip first!

"In the years before my twenty years of blotting-book experience, where do you think I was? 'Nowhere,' say you quite calmly, as if extinction were possible. But this comes of gossipmongering instead of learning. Listen now, then, and be taught by a chat; your only chance!

"Once in those ante-blotting-book days I existed in another condition; had an active life of my own, though but a vegetable one; was not at the mercy of other people's impressions—knew nothing of human sorrow and sin: but sprouted and grew, imbibed food from elements and gases, blossomed and came to perfection, with thousands of companions; a cotton plant, waving white in broad plantations under the warm suns of central America.

"But with perfection, came, alas! destruction and death. Mown down in ranks, as we stood in the full enjoyment of the life allotted to us, a blank succeeded, which I have sometimes wished had lasted for ever.

"For the natural life, harmonious, if humble; perfect in its kind, was gone; and the infused one

which succeeded, if higher, was a burden, troubled and anxious.

"But I had no choice; human art was brought to bear upon me; human skill wove the inanimate fibres into a texture, human fingers formed the texture into a garment. I became the covering of a throbbing human heart, and learnt the secrets of individual human life!

"What I *could* say if I would! but shame upon me if I did! Enough that, as I have told you already, individual life is honest with itself. Enough that the individual sometimes aspires,—sighs, struggles, to be other and better than he is; chides himself, condemns himself, humbles himself—for such there must be hope.

"A weary existence perhaps; a strange change from the calm of my previous condition, but full of a tempest-tossed interest, which had its own particular charm.

"And before I was quite worn out, the mysterious conclusion took place. The life had grown freer, grander, more at ease, as time went on; there was less tumult, more harmony, more repose; a new element seemed infused; it was as if the peace of the old humbler existence were joined to the hopes of the new. But the heart, meantime, was beating feebler and feebler, and a day came when it ceased to beat at all. . . .

"It was well that I was worn and worthless. I would not have been otherwise if I could. I desired no new heart-communion; could have ill

borne a sense of fresh struggles. To be thrown aside was a comfort; and the blank which succeeded was a rest.

"And then followed phase the third! Human skill went to work upon my substance, human science directing the way. Chemistry cleansed me; machinery chopped me up into shreds. I was mashed up with water into a pulp; passed over rollers and flannels without end; squeezed, pressed, and finally dried, till the fine calico texture was transmuted into soft red sheets of paper—the blotting-paper which furnished this book—twenty years ago!

"And looking back from this third phase of being to the others, I hereby put upon record that it is the least worthy; that what is called 'society' needs a mighty change. Learning, wisdom, and progress, may have done what they please; they have not made 'society' sincere as it should be; they have not made it happy as it might be; they have not made it wise.

"Come up, ghosts of my letters, and prove the truth of what I say! Reveal yourselves one and all! Come, writers of those letters,—face my visions, if you dare!—meet each other without shame, if you can! Friends, lovers, relatives, do you shrink? . . . .

"Hush! Let us be thankful that the experiment is impossible; that we cannot unearth what may have been repented of. Let it rest under cypress and rue!

"Yet some things indeed one would wish to

make known, for they give hope. 'Society' is but a mass of individuals, and the individual, when himself—when honest—when struggling, even if frail, touches the heart. The sin is in the gulf that lies between the closet and the saloon; between what a man knows he is and what he pretends to be; between what he really feels and what he shams . . . .

"And some things I even promised to make known:—What became of the Bride?

"In this book there is another corner, which tells another portion of the tale.

"The writing it retains is irregular, and half formed; the letters large and uncouth; the hand must have shaken which traced them, or the writer must have been a child.

"'DEAREST GRANDMAMMA,

"'*Mamma says I am quite an old man now, with three little brothers and sisters. So I am to write and tell you they are well, and mamma is very happy, and the baby is to be called Agatha, when it is christened. And we boys are to take care of her. And you are to mind and come, and please bring us some barley-sugar. And we mean to listen when you tell us to be good, though we do like fairy tales better.*

"'*Your affectionate Grandson,*

"'LOUIS.'

"The vulture connection gone back to their holes